

# Head Injury in Children

## Information for Parents & Caregivers

In an emergency phone:  
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Return to the Emergency  
Department immediately  
if there is:

- > confusion or unusual behaviour
- > drowsiness
- > continuing or increasing headache
- > vomiting
- > severe irritability in a baby
- > unsteadiness or fits
- > if you are worried in any way.

Possible Long-term Effects after a  
significant Head Injury:

Weeks or months later you or your  
child's teacher may notice:

- > Memory/learning difficulties
- > Behavioural changes
- > Speech and language difficulties
- > Poor co-ordination

Most will get better with time but if you  
are concerned contact your local GP or  
make an appointment with the  
hospital's Concussion clinic:

[www.wch.sa.gov.au/cabirs](http://www.wch.sa.gov.au/cabirs)

### For more information:

[www.kidsafesa.com.au](http://www.kidsafesa.com.au)

Women's and Children's Hospital  
Emergency Department  
72 King William Rd,  
North Adelaide SA 5006  
Telephone (08) 8161 7000

Last reviewed: June 2020

The Women's & Children's Hospital is a smoke-free  
site.



[www.ausgoal.gov.au/creative-commons](http://www.ausgoal.gov.au/creative-commons)

## What are the dangers of head injuries?

Most children who receive head injuries do not have long-term problems. A small number, however, may receive damage which could affect the brain. This is more likely in babies or in children injured in a motor vehicle accident or a fall from height. It is important to be able to recognise which children may have brain injuries so that they can be properly treated.

## What is concussion?

Concussion is when a child who has had a head injury:

- > Is confused or loses consciousness
- > Has no memory of the accident or the time around the accident.

Although most children who are concussed do not have a serious injury they must be watched closely.

If they do not return to normal they should see a doctor so that further investigations can be carried out. Children who have suffered concussion should not play contact sport (e.g. soccer, football) until they obtain medical clearance. Some children who have ongoing problems post head injury will require a slow return to school with supervision. Further head injuries must be avoided. For further information see Concussion handout.

## Which X-rays are helpful in head injuries?

Most children with a minor head injury do not need any X-rays or a CT. They will be observed for several hours after the injury and discharged if stable.

Occasionally Skull X-rays can be helpful to identify a fracture, particularly in babies (a fracture is a crack or break in a bone), but even if a fracture is not seen, this does not tell us if the brain is safe.

CT scans are used when the child has had a high risk injury, such as a motor vehicle accident or high fall, or if they have concerning symptoms or signs when examined by the doctor.

CT scans involve a dose of radiation to the brain, so are used carefully. Please discuss this with your doctor if you want further clarification.

## When is a child with a head injury considered safe to go home?

The child is safe to go home if:

- > the accident was minor and there was no concussion,
- > the concussion is mild and is improving,
- > there is no headache or vomiting, or they are mild and improving,
- > the child is not confused

The chances of brain damage are small, but the child should be watched closely by a responsible adult.

## Is it dangerous to let my child sleep?

Most children want to sleep after a head injury. However, when they wake, they should behave as normal and not be unusually confused or irritable.

## How can I help protect my child from head injury?

Repeated head injuries, even if minor, can be very dangerous. Do not allow your child to return to sport or an activity where they may injure their head, until they are completely back to normal.

### **Helmets for heads**

Insist on helmets when on bikes, roller blades, skateboards or horses.

### **Buckle up**

Use appropriate car seats/safety restraints to Australian Safety Design Standards.

### **Watch that toddler**

Beware of steps or other unguarded heights. Do not use baby walkers.

### **Road awareness**

DO NOT LET children near roads without supervision.

Watch for children when driving.

Watch for children in driveway.