

Head Trauma

What is head trauma?

Head trauma is an injury to the head when, for example, you fall and hit your head or something hits you on the head. Sometimes you may be hit hard enough that you have a concussion, which is an injury to the brain caused by a blow to the head. Minor (less serious) head trauma does not cause a concussion.

How does it occur?

Common causes of head injuries are car or motorcycle accidents, bicycle accidents, and falls around the house. Babies that are shaken are at risk for internal head injuries.

What are the symptoms?

Even minor head trauma can be quite painful. The face and scalp are more sensitive than most of the other parts of the body. The head has a rich blood supply so that even a small cut to the face or scalp may bleed a lot. As blood collects under the skin, you may have a large swollen area where the blood clots. This isn't dangerous and it goes away in a week or two.

The symptoms of a more serious injury, such as a concussion, are:

- trouble remembering what happened just before, during, or after the accident
- confusion
- sleepiness or loss of consciousness
- dizziness
- trouble concentrating
- vomiting
- changes in vision
- seizures.

If you are concerned that you may have suffered a more serious head injury or a concussion, contact your healthcare provider or go the nearest emergency department to be examined.

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about how you hurt your head and examine you. He or she will check for signs or symptoms of a more serious injury, such as a concussion.

How is it treated?

If you cut your head and the cut is very long or deep, it may need stitches. You may also need a tetanus shot, depending on how you were injured and when you had your last shot.

For a minor head injury, you can take acetaminophen or ibuprofen for pain if you don't have a medical reason for not taking these drugs. Don't take aspirin because it may make the bleeding worse. Don't take any pain medicines that might make you sleepy or confused (like narcotics or sedatives such as Valium) unless you take these medicines regularly for another medical problem. The effects of these drugs might be confused with signs of a concussion.

If your neck hurts after a head injury, it is best to try not to move more than is necessary until it is checked by a healthcare provider. Anyone with a possibly serious neck injury should not move at all and an ambulance should be called.

How long will the effects last?

After minor head trauma the headache may last for a few hours. You may have swelling or a bruise for a week or two.

How can I help prevent head trauma?

Wear a helmet when you do activities that may risk getting your head hit, such as bicycling, rock climbing, and white-water kayaking.

Always wear a seat belt when you are traveling in a car.

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This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.

Written by Tom Richards, MD.

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