

HEAD INJURY PRECAUTIONS

Head Injuries

Mild head injuries and knocks to the head are common, particularly in children. Following the injury, if the person is awake (conscious), and there is no deep cut or severe head damage, it is unusual for there to be any damage to the brain.

However, sometimes a knock to the head can cause damage to the brain or to a blood vessel next to the brain. A damaged blood vessel may bleed into the brain, or more commonly, into the area between the brain and the skull (a subdural hemorrhage). This is uncommon, but can be serious, as a build-up of clotting blood can cause pressure on the brain.

Symptoms of damage or bleeding may not develop for some hours, or even days, after a knock to the head. In rare cases, symptoms from a slow bleed can develop even weeks after a head injury. This is why head injury instructions are given to people who have had a head injury. These provide information, including symptoms to look out for following a knock to the head.

Contact your doctor or emergency room if you notice any of the symptoms below:

- Drowsiness when you would normally be wide awake (but see below)
- The injury was associated with loss of consciousness or penetrating injury to the head
- Worsening headache or non-resolving headache
- Confusion, strange behavior and any problems with understanding or speaking
- Inability to remember events before or after the head injury
- Vomiting (see note below)
- Loss of use of part of the body- for example, weakness in an arm or a leg
- Dizziness, loss of balance or walking strangely
- Convulsions or collapse
- Any visual problems, such as blurring of vision or double vision
- Blood or clear fluid leaking from the nose or ear
- New deafness in one or both ears
- Unusual breathing patterns

A note about drowsiness

After a knock to the head, children will often cry, be distressed and then settle down. It is then quite common for them to want to sleep for a short while. This is normal. However, it will appear to be a normal 'peaceful' sleep, and they wake up fully after a nap. Some parents are afraid to let their children go to sleep if the accident happens just before bedtime. Do let them. Excessive drowsiness means they cannot be roused. If you have a concern, wake the child up after an hour or so. They may be grumpy about being woken up, but that is reassuring. You can then let him or her go back off to sleep again. When asleep, check to see that he or she appears to be breathing normally and is sleeping in a normal position.

A note about headache

It is normal after a knock to the head to have a mild headache. Sometimes there is also tenderness, bruising, or mild swelling of the scalp. If your headache becomes worse and worse, this is concerning.

A note about vomiting

Vomiting might occur once soon after head injury, but progressive vomiting is always a concerning sign.

If you have any doubt about a symptom following a head injury then it is best to get it checked out by a doctor as soon as possible. Also, see a doctor if you feel that you have not completely recovered after two weeks.