

Caring for your child after their head injury



Your child has a head injury and has been allowed home by a health care professional. Usually things are fine and there are no long-term complications but sometimes the child's brain has suffered more of a shake than was obvious to start with. This leaflet will help you care for your child and recognise and deal with problems should they develop.

Warning signs

You should seek medical help (either go to the hospital or call 111 for an ambulance) if your child has any of the following warning signs in the first 24 hours after the injury:

- Is hard to wake (at night) or will not stay awake (during the daytime)
- Will not drink or feed (if a baby or infant)
- Suddenly goes out cold (unconscious) or passes out
- Repeatedly vomits (throws up)
- Seems to be confused or behaves strangely
- Is very grumpy or irritable
- Has fits or seizures (repeated jerking movements of the arms, legs or face, even if they have epilepsy)
- Slurs their speech
- Doesn't seem to recognise you
- Has become cross-eyed or their eyes are doing funny things

- Becomes weaker or more unsteady
- Complains of a worsening headache
- Cries more than usual and will not settle down
- Doesn't seem well to you.

Common symptoms in children that don't need to worry you

For a few days after a head injury it is normal for a child to:

- Feel a little unsteady or giddy
- Not feel like playing with one thing for long or doing schoolwork or homework
- Be a little bit grumpy
- Seem to need more sleep than usual
- Complain of a bit of a headache
- Dislike loud noises.

All these things should normally get a bit better as each day passes.



Head injuries are common, but very few are associated with brain injuries. A minor brain injury is similar to bruising on other parts of the body. Symptoms usually last for seven-10 days.

Caring for your child's head injury

Sleep

After a head injury your child might want to sleep more than usual. This is normal. Your child should rest when they feel tired. Watching television and/or a computer screen is not the best form of rest to recover from a head injury.

Pain Relief

Pain relief like paracetamol (eg. Panadol or Pamol) is perfectly safe for their headache. Check with your doctor about other medications your child may be on or need.

Play

Your child may not want to focus on one thing (like a game or schoolwork) for the first few days after the injury. This is normal.

Your child must avoid rough play for at least two days following the injury. For at least three weeks following the injury your child should avoid rough sports and any activities that could lead them to hit their head.

School or Child Care

Your child should have one or two days off crèche, day-care, preschool or school, following their head injury. When your child returns to school, tell the teachers/caregivers about the injury.

Your child should start to feel better in three to four days after the injury. See your family doctor if your child is still having problems after two weeks.



This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care or advice.