

Concussion Information

for Patients and Families



Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation
Fondation ontarienne de neurotraumatologie

Concussion Information for Patients and Families

This Concussion Booklet was created to give you the information you need to know to get better after a concussion. It can be helpful in the first few days and during recovery. The booklet is for people of any age.

In this booklet you will find information on:

- what a concussion is
- symptoms of a concussion
- warning signs of more serious brain injuries
- getting better from a concussion
- do's and don'ts in the first few days
- care and recovery pathway
- what if I am not getting better?
- who can help?
- key questions to ask healthcare providers

You do not have to read the booklet all at once. Come back to the information as you need it.

This information is based on Standards for Post-Concussion Care and was developed by concussion experts. For more information, please visit the Concussions Ontario website: www.concussionsontario.org



This booklet can be helpful if you are a person who recently suffered a concussion, or if you are a family member or support person helping someone who has. It can also be used by friends, teachers, employers or coaches.

About concussion

What is a concussion?

A concussion is a brain injury that can affect how your brain works. Concussions may happen because of a hit to the head, neck, face or somewhere else on the body that makes the brain move quickly back and forth inside the skull. The brain can become injured if this happens. Falling, being in a collision, playing sports or being hit by an object or person are some examples of actions that can cause a concussion. **Only a medical professional (doctor or nurse practitioner) can medically diagnose a concussion.**

Everyone's concussion experience is different. It is important to know that concussions can affect parts of life such as going to work or school, being physically active, playing sports and taking part in family and day-to-day activities.



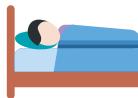
DID YOU KNOW?

You do not need to hit your head or lose consciousness to have a concussion.

How will I feel after I have had a concussion?

Concussions can lead to symptoms that might appear right away or a few days later. Symptoms can last for days, weeks or even longer. Some people may experience only one symptom and others may experience many.

Concussions can affect how you think and feel, as well as your mood and sleep. Here are examples of symptoms that you might experience after a concussion:

THINKING		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling foggy• Trouble thinking clearly• Feeling slowed down• Hard time remembering and focusing• Trouble finding words
PHYSICAL		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Headaches• Throwing up• Dizziness• Sensitive to light and noise• Vision problems (blurred or double vision)• Balance problems• Ringing in ears• Low energy or feeling sluggish
EMOTIONAL/ MOOD		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Irritable• Nervous or anxious• Frustrated• Angry• Sad
SLEEP		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sleeping more or less than you normally would• Hard time falling asleep or staying asleep



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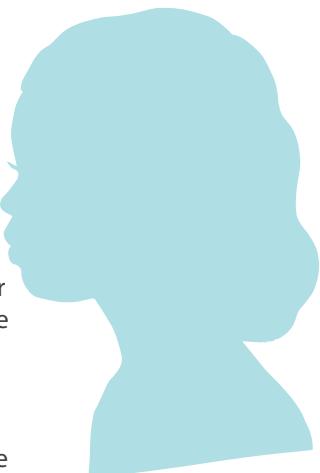
- [The Centre for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#)
- [Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre](#)
- [Brainline.org](#)

Things to watch out for ...

Track your symptoms by writing them down. Your family members or support person can help with this. Talk with your primary healthcare provider (the person you see most often for your medical issues) about any change in your symptoms so they can rule out something that might be more serious. Here are some warning signs that are linked to more serious brain injuries:

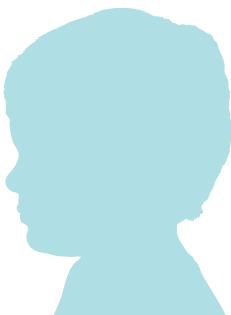
Warning signs in adults

- Headaches that won't go away and/or get worse
- Sudden or severe throwing up or feeling like you are going to be sick (nausea)
- Fainting or blacking out
- Difficulty waking up
- Feeling sleepy
- Seizures or convulsions
- Unable to recognize people or places that you know
- Feeling confused, restless or agitated
- Feeling weak
- Numbness in different parts of your body
- Poor balance or coordination
- Slurred speech, trouble talking or not making sense
- Fluid or bleeding from your ear or nose
- Not behaving like your usual self
- Having one pupil in your eye bigger than the other



Warning signs in children

- Any of the adult warning signs
- Will not stop crying and cannot be consoled or soothed
- Will not nurse or eat



If you experience any of these warning signs after a concussion, call your doctor or go to the emergency department right away.

Getting better from a concussion: What does it mean?

See your primary healthcare provider or an experienced concussion expert within 1-2 weeks of your diagnosis. This can be your family doctor, a children's doctor, sports medicine doctor or a nurse practitioner. They will check your symptoms, monitor how you are doing and decide if or when they need to see you again.



DID YOU KNOW?

Most people who experience a concussion make a full recovery, with symptoms lasting 1-4 weeks.



For tips to help you and your family manage your concussion in the first few days check out the “Concussion Do’s and Don’ts” handout in the booklet or download your free copy from concussionsontario.org



Check out the “Concussion Care and Recovery Pathway” handout in the booklet to help guide you through your concussion journey or download your free copy from concussionsontario.org

What if I am not getting better?

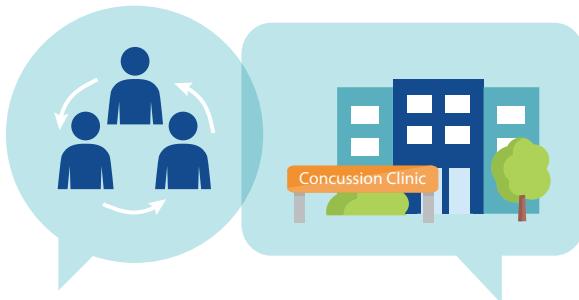
Most people recover by one month. For some, concussion recovery can take longer, with their symptoms lasting for 1-3 months. In fewer cases, symptoms can last longer than that. Symptoms that last longer than three months are referred to as 'persistent symptoms.'

It is important to give the brain time to heal. Don't wait too long to get the care you need. Talk to your primary healthcare provider if you are concerned.



Getting better from a concussion may take longer if you:

- are a teenager or an older adult
- go back to school, exercise or work too soon
- have had a concussion before
- have a history of migraine headaches
- have mental health issues such as depression or anxiety
- have trouble sleeping
- are female
- are showing signs of vestibular or visual abnormalities (e.g. blurred vision, dizziness, difficulty focusing, motion sensitivity)



If your primary healthcare provider begins to have concerns about your symptoms not improving, they might refer you to a concussion clinic or a group of providers who will help to manage your symptoms.

Before you see the first available healthcare provider for your concussion care, make sure they are the right provider for you. They should work closely with other providers who have different knowledge and skills to help you with all your symptoms.

See the sections on “Who can help me with my concussion?” and “Getting the right care: Key questions to ask concussion clinics or groups of providers” for a list of different healthcare providers and their role in concussion care.

If after a few months your symptoms are still not improving, think about looking for another provider with knowledge and skills in the area that you are concerned about.



This information comes from:

- [The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital](#)
- [Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre](#)

Who can help me with my concussion?

Your primary healthcare provider might work with other healthcare providers or refer you to a concussion clinic.

Concussion clinics should have a variety of healthcare providers who can help you work towards recovery so that you can return to the things you love and need to do.



For more information on quality care, read the Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation's (ONF) "Standards for Post-Concussion Care" online at concussionsontario.org



The healthcare providers at your concussion clinic should play a role in:



- helping you manage your appointments



- providing you with information on and teaching you about concussion and what to do to get better

Here is a list of the different healthcare providers who practice in concussion clinics and the roles they play:

Medical treatment decisions and clearance

- Medical Doctor (one of):
 - Sport Medicine Doctor
 - Family Doctor
 - Physiatrist (rehabilitation doctor)
 - Neurologist
 - Neurosurgeon
 - Psychiatrist
- Nurse Practitioner
- Neuropsychologists (diagnosis)

Providing physical treatment

- Nurse
- Physiotherapist
- Chiropractor
- Vestibular Therapist
- Optometrist
- Registered Massage Therapist

Helping with functional/behavioural/emotional issues

- Occupational Therapist
- Psychiatrist
- Clinical Psychologist
- Neuropsychologist
- Social Worker
- Speech-Language Pathologist
- Nutritionist

- 
- keeping your primary healthcare provider up to date about your concussion care

- 
- talking to people (with your permission) at your work, school or sport setting, at your home or residence, to help you get back to day-to-day life

- 
- referring or connecting you to other healthcare providers when needed



Getting the right care: Questions to ask concussion clinics or groups of providers

Having a concussion can be overwhelming and stressful. It can be hard to know the right things to ask to make sure that you are getting the right type of care. Here are some examples of questions and tips to think about as you talk with your healthcare provider. You can also download a copy of the full Interview Guide from concussionsontario.org, as you explore what you need for your concussion care.



TIP #1:

Not all concussion clinics follow the ONF's standards for quality concussion care. Ask questions about the clinic and the healthcare providers to make sure you are getting the right care for you.

Questions about providers' concussion experience

- What experience does the clinic have in working with people who have brain injuries like concussion?
- Can anyone (e.g. children, athletes) with a concussion be seen at the clinic?
- What is the clinic's experience working with schools, sport teams or employers? Will someone at the clinic speak with my employer, teacher or coach to help me get back to my daily activities?



TIP #2:

Healthcare providers delivering concussion care should have experience working with patients with concussion or be supervised by someone who has specialized training or experience.



Questions about concussion services

- Which healthcare providers offer concussion care at the clinic?
- Will everyone here work as a team to support me and my care?
- How long will it take for me to be seen by someone at the clinic?
- What types of services does the clinic offer?
- What services are covered by OHIP? By group benefits?
By other insurance? By myself?



TIP #3:

A medical professional such as a doctor or nurse practitioner should be directly involved in your care. They may be at the concussion clinic you are getting care at or at your main health office. They should receive information from others involved in your care.



TIP #4:

Some services are not covered by OHIP. It is a rule that healthcare providers tell you how much these services cost and provide you with options to consider.



Questions about ongoing concussion care

- If I have problems that no one at the clinic can help me with, will you be able to refer me to the appropriate healthcare provider?
- Will I still be able to receive care at this clinic even if I get referred to someone else?
- What happens while I am waiting for the referral appointment?



TIP #5:

For you to feel better, healthcare providers involved in your concussion care need to talk to one another and work as a team. It is important for healthcare providers to:

- make sure you have the services you need during your recovery
- work with you on things that may be hard in your day-to-day activities
- always connect with the other team members who are helping you to get better
- work with the doctor or nurse practitioner who will clear you to go back to work, school or play



Helpful resources and links

If you found this booklet helpful, you may want to learn more about concussions. There are many other resources available. For more information from the Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation, visit www.concussionsontario.org

The Ontario Brain Injury Association (OBIA) is a provincial organization focused on making a difference in the lives of people living with the effects of an acquired brain injury.

OBIA has a support-line (1-800-263-5404), concussion resources, and a listing of 21 local Brain Injury Associations around the province that patients and family members can contact. There is also the online Concussion Support Group available. For more information, visit www.obia.ca



Notes



Provide feedback
on this materials

Notes

About the Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation

The Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation is a non-profit organization funded by the Ontario government. ONF uses research to create the best care strategies to help Ontarians with neurotrauma (injury to the brain and spinal cord) lead full lives. ONF connects healthcare practitioners, people living with neurotrauma, researchers, providers and policy makers to the information they need about neurotrauma prevention and health practices. We do this work through regional, provincial, national and international collaborations and partnerships. For more information visit www.onf.org

This Concussion Education Booklet was prepared by Evidence to Care at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital. Evidence to Care (EtC) is a specialized team of knowledge translation experts supporting the hospital in its commitment to transform care through evidence, knowledge generation, and translation. Through collaborative efforts, EtC strives to make research evidence accessible in promoting evidence-based care in rehabilitation.

We wish to thank the ONF Concussion Advisory Committee, the Ontario Brain Injury Association and the Patients and Families that advised on the design for this handbook.

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