

Concussions

When you think of Sidney Crosby, you think of hockey, The Pittsburgh Penguins and perhaps even concussions. Concussions have been making the sports headlines lately as health professionals raise more concern about the seriousness of the injury. But concussions don't only happen to professional athletes; they happen quite frequently and can happen to you!

There are numerous ways a person can receive a concussion. Some examples might include being hit in the head with a soccer ball, falling onto the hard packed snow while skiing, or even falling off a bicycle. Other ways might involve being pushed to the floor of a basketball or tennis court or being checked into the boards while playing hockey. If any of these things have happened to you or your child, then it is possible that there may have been an injury to the brain, otherwise known as, a concussion.

A concussion may occur if there is any blow to the head, neck, face or body. When your head or body collides with another object it sometimes causes your brain to shake inside your skull which can result in a variety of signs and symptoms. There are many types of signs and symptoms to watch for: some may be physical (things you can see), others may be changes in the way a person thinks or feels. The physical symptoms may range from headache, nausea or vomiting, dizziness, blurred vision to loss of consciousness. Some people may be confused and have difficulty remembering or concentrating. Some of the emotional changes may include irritability, sadness, and an increase in nervousness or anxiety. You should know that not all concussions are obvious. They cannot be detected on routine x-rays. That is why it is called the "invisible injury". Some of the signs and symptoms may not occur until later that day or even the next day. Another thing to remember is that no two concussions are the same. The signs and symptoms are different between every person. It is essential to see a doctor if you ever experience any sort of hard hit to your head or body.

As a parent, prevention is the key. Children need to know how to play safe, and follow the rules and regulations that are associated with each sport or activity. It is very important to reinforce the necessity to wear the proper protective gear and to ensure that the gear fits properly and is in good condition.

Properly wearing a suitable helmet is essential in reducing your risk from receiving a brain injury! Helmets are available for many sports such as hockey, skating, downhill skiing, skateboarding or scootering, in-line skating and bicycling. Helmets should also be worn when participating in many activities that involve motorized vehicles such as motorcycles, quads, and snowmobiles. Helmets cannot prevent concussions but they can definitely reduce the risk and /or decrease the severity of the injury should an impact occur.

When purchasing a helmet for you or your child there are a few important things to consider. You need to make sure that the helmet you have is properly designed for the specific activity. For example, most bicycle helmets are single use, meaning they can be used for bicycling but do not provide the proper protection while skateboarding. There should be a helmet certification sticker on the inside of the helmet to indicate the activity for which it was intended. There are also single and multiple impact helmets. This means that some helmets are not effective after they have been involved in a crash, for example bicycle or ski helmets. Other helmets provide protection for several hits, for example, hockey helmets.

If you do become injured, you need to follow up with a doctor to ensure that you receive the proper care and treatment. If your injury has resulted in a concussion, it is very important that you listen to your doctor's advice. If symptoms still persist, do not return back to work or play. The only way to heal your brain is to rest it. If the brain is not fully recovered, you become at high risk for further injury.

For more information, refer to Parachute, Canada's Injury Prevention Organization, at their website, <http://www.parachutecanada.org/>

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