

DESCRIPTION

An injury that involves the scalp, skull, or brain. Head injuries can cause physical problems, cognitive (thinking) dysfunction, or emotional changes. Most head injuries are minor (such as a small bump or "goose egg" on the head), but some can be life-threatening, or cause permanent brain damage.

MINOR HEAD INJURIES

Minor head injuries are the result of trauma to the head without injury to the brain.

Symptoms associated with minor head injuries vary from person to person and may include a mild to moderate headache, dizziness and nausea. Other symptoms, such as neck pain, ringing in the ears and feeling tired, anxious, irritable or depressed, may also occur. Treatment usually includes ice and a mild pain medication such as acetaminophen. X-rays or CT scans for minor head injuries are usually unnecessary. While a mild headache may persist for days, increasing pain or new symptoms may indicate a more serious injury that requires reevaluation.

CONCUSSION

A concussion is an injury to the brain that results in a temporary alteration in normal brain function such as brief loss of consciousness, or loss of memory surrounding the event. A concussion does not cause major bruising or bleeding to the brain. A CT scan of the head would appear normal. Symptoms of a concussion can last from hours to months and may include; headaches, confusion, difficulty with concentration, memory and sleep. These longer-lasting symptoms are commonly referred to as post concussive syndrome. More serious injuries, such as skull fractures, contusions or hematomas of the brain (not scalp), are usually managed in a hospital setting.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Outcomes will vary depending on the severity of the head injury. Most head injuries do not cause permanent damage, although it is not unusual to be unable to recall the events surrounding the incident.

GENERAL MEASURES

- While it is not true that a person must be kept continually awake after a head injury, it is recommended that the person stay with someone capable of observing them for new or worsening symptoms for the next 24 hours.
- Avoid drugs and alcohol for the next 48 hours.

MEDICATIONS

For self-care, you may use acetaminophen for pain or discomfort. Avoid aspirin. It can increase bleeding risk.

SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF YOU EXPERIENCE:

- Difficulty with speech or vision
- Vomiting
- Seizures
- Weakness or numbness in the arms or legs
- Dilated pupils or pupils that are different sizes
- Bloody or clear drainage from the ears or nose
- Fever
- Increasing neck pain
- Confusion or a change in behavior
- New symptoms or symptoms such as headache, nausea or sleepiness get worse