

# Head injury



## Age 4 and older

Most injuries to the head are minor. Bumps, cuts, and scrapes on the head and face usually heal well and can be treated the same as injuries to other parts of the body. Superficial cuts on the head often bleed heavily because the face and scalp have many blood vessels close to the surface of the skin. Often the injury is not severe, and the bleeding will stop with home treatment.

Many head injuries can be prevented. Use seat belts and helmets, and make your home safe to prevent falls.

### Common causes of serious head injuries in adults include:

- **Car crashes.** Almost half of all head injuries occur during a car crash. Teens and young adults are more likely to be hurt in car crashes than other age groups.
- **Falls,** which are more likely to involve children younger than age 5 and adults older than age 60.
- **Sports-related injuries** and **work-related accidents.** Men have about twice as many head injuries as women. Sports-related injuries are very common but are not always reported.
- **Assaults** and **violent attacks.** Gunshot wounds are the leading cause of death from a head injury.

Head injuries that involve force are more likely to cause a serious injury to the brain. A high-energy injury to the head increases the likelihood of a serious injury even more. It is important to evaluate the person for signs and symptoms of a head injury after a fall or other type of head injury.

It is sometimes difficult to tell the difference between a mild concussion and a more serious head injury. A person with a concussion may appear dazed, stare blankly, or cry for no apparent reason. Nausea, vomiting, headache, or dizziness may be present. A visit to a doctor is needed anytime mild symptoms persist. Even if a visit to a doctor is not needed, watch anyone who has had a head injury carefully for at least 24 hours to see whether signs of a serious head injury develop.

Occasionally, after a head injury you may feel as if you are not functioning as well as you did before the injury (postconcussive syndrome). You may have blurred vision, headache, nausea, vomiting, forgetfulness, or trouble concentrating. Some people have problems with balance and coordination and personality changes. These changes may be related to stress from the events surrounding the accident that caused the injury or from the injury itself. Many people have symptoms for as long as 3 months after a head injury, and some even have problems for as long as a year afterward.

When a head injury has occurred, look for other injuries to other parts of the body that also may need attention. Difficulty breathing, shock, spinal injuries, and severe bleeding are all life-threatening injuries that may occur along with a head injury and require immediate medical attention. Injuries to the spine, especially the neck, must be considered when there has been a head injury.

(over)

## Prevention

You can help prevent head injuries.

- Wear your seat belt when in a motor vehicle. Use child car seats.
- Do not use alcohol or other drugs before participating in sports or when operating a motor vehicle or other equipment.
- Wear a helmet and other protective clothing whenever you are biking, motorcycling, skating, skate boarding, kayaking, horseback riding, skiing, snowboarding, or rock climbing.
- Wear a hard hat if you work in an industrial area.
- Do not dive into shallow or unfamiliar water.
- Prevent falls in your home by removing hazards that might cause a fall.
- Do not keep firearms in your home. If you must keep firearms, lock them up and store them unloaded and uncocked. Lock ammunition in a separate area.

For additional information you can go to the Healthwise® Knowledgebase and search on head injuries. Go to [fchp.org](http://fchp.org). Under "Members," click "search Healthwise Knowledgebase." Once on the Healthwise Knowledgebase page, type "head injuries" in the search box.



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