Mild Head Injury

What is a mild head injury?
You have what is medically described as a mild head injury. Most people recover rapidly following a mild head injury. A few people may suffer from ongoing symptoms over a longer period.

There is a small risk of you developing serious complications so you should be watched closely by a responsible adult for 24 hours after the accident.

You will have been assessed as having a very low risk for serious complications. You may or may not have had a CT scan of your head (for most mild head injuries these are not necessary).

Warning signs
See your local doctor or go to the Emergency Department if you (or your carer notices):
- Feel faint or drowsy - or you can’t be woken up
- Are acting strange, saying things that do not make sense (change in behaviour)
- Have a constant severe headache or a headache that gets worse
- Are vomiting or throwing up more than twice
- Cannot remember new events, recognise people or places (increased confusion)
- Pass out or have a blackout or a seizure (any jerking of the body or limbs)
- Cannot move parts of your body or clumsiness
- Blurred vision or slurred speech
- Fluid or bleeding from the ear or nose

The first 24-48 hours after injury

Warning Signs: You should be observed and return to hospital if you develop any of the above warning signs.

Rest / Sleeping: Rest and avoid strenuous activity for at least 24 hours. It is alright for you to sleep tonight but you should be checked every four to six hours by someone to make sure you are alright.

Driving: Do not drive for at least 24 hours. You should not drive until you feel much better and can concentrate properly. Talk to your doctor.

Drinking / Drugs: Do not drink alcohol or take sleeping pills or recreational drugs in the next 48 hours. All of these can make you feel worse. They also make it hard for other people to tell whether the injury is affecting you or not.

Pain Relief: Use paracetamol or paracetamol / codeine for headaches. Do not use aspirin or anti inflammatory pain reliever such as ibuprofen or naproxen (NSAIDs), which may increase the risk of complications.

Sports: Do not play sports for at least 48 hours and only after review by your GP or another clinician with expertise in this area.


The first 4 weeks after injury

Sometimes after a head injury there are lingering effects referred to as post concussive symptoms. These usually resolve after a few weeks.

Tiredness can exaggerate the symptoms. Return to your normal activities gradually (not all at once) during the first weeks or months.
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You can help yourself get better by:

Rest / Sleeping: It is important to get adequate amounts of sleep to allow brain recovery.

Driving: Do not drive or operate machinery if you do not feel your normal self, talk to your doctor.

Drinking / Drugs: Do not drink alcohol or use recreational drugs until you are fully recovered. They will make you feel much worse. Do not take medication unless advised by your doctor.

Work / Study: You may need to take time off work or study until you can concentrate better. Everybody is different, discuss this with your doctor and your employer / supervisor.

Sport / Lifestyle: It is dangerous for the brain to be injured again if it is has not recovered from the first injury. Talk to your doctor about the steps you need to take to gradually increase sports activity and return to play. If in doubt “sit it out”. Particularly contact sports.

Relationships: Sometimes your symptoms will affect your relationship with family and friends. You may suffer irritability and mood swings. See your doctor if you or your family are worried.

Instructions:

Recovery
Your doctor can monitor these symptoms and may refer you to a specialist if you do not improve over 4 weeks up to 3 months.

Post Concussion Symptoms
Can occur after some delay and when you become more active.

- Mild headaches (that won’t go away)
- Attention and concentration problems
- Memory difficulties / forgetfulness
- Feeling dizzy or sick without vomiting (nausea)
- Balance problems
- Difficulty making decisions and getting organised
- Feeling vague, slowed or “foggy” in your thinking
- More tired than usual and lacking energy (fatigued)
- Irritability. Losing your temper and getting annoyed easily
- Mood swings
- Anxiety or depression
- Mild behavioural change
- More sensitive to sounds or lights
- Change in sleep patterns. Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Reduced tolerance to alcohol

Seeking help: In a medical emergency go to your nearest emergency department or call 000.

Disclaimer: This health information is for general education purposes only. Always consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for you.