

Appendix 9



Minor Head Injury Guidance

Introduction

A knock, bump or blow to the head is a common type of injury. Each year over one million people visit hospital with a head injury, with approximately 135,000 being admitted because of the severity of their injury.

However, for most people a head injury is usually quite minor. A minor head injury or bump or knock to the head should not result in any permanent damage, and symptoms are usually mild and short-lasting.

As long as someone remains conscious and there is no deep cut or damage to the head (such as broken bone), then there will usually be no damage to the brain. Such a minor injury does not normally require any specific treatment, except rest and close observation.

Children are particularly prone to having minor head injuries as they have high energy levels and little sense of danger. However, if you notice your child's symptoms worsen after a knock or blow to the head, you should seek medical assistance straight away. This is because the symptoms of a more severe injury can take time to develop in some cases. It is therefore very important that you observe your child closely following a bump or knock to the head, to check for changes in their symptoms or behaviour.

If you have suffered a minor head injury, try to stay with someone for the first 24 hours, and make them aware that you have had a head injury. This way they can be alert to any changes in your symptoms.

Symptoms

A minor head injury often causes a bump or bruise on the exterior of the head. Other symptoms may also include:

- Nausea,
- Mild headache
- Tender bruising or mild swelling of the scalp
- Mild dizziness

If your child experiences these mild symptoms after a knock, bump or blow to the head, then they do not require any specific treatment. You should however observe them closely for the following 48 hours, to check to see if their symptoms change or worsen.

Most children will make a full recovery. However, if you notice any change in their behaviour, or their symptoms worsen, seek medical assistance straight away. If you notice the following symptoms in either yourself, or your child, following a bang to the head, then seek medical assistance immediately.

- A lasting headache which worsens, or is still present over six hours following the injury
- Extreme difficulty in staying awake, or still being sleepy several hours after the injury
- Two or more bouts of vomiting
- Unconsciousness, either for a short or extended period of time
- Unequal pupil size
- Straw coloured or blood stained fluid coming from the nose or ears. This is cerebrospinal fluid which normally surrounds the brain
- Severe dizziness or loss of balance
- Confusion or strange behaviour
- Problems with memory
- Bleeding from the scalp that cannot be quickly stopped
- Not being able to use part of the body, such as weakness in an arm or leg
- Difficulty seeing or double vision
- Slurred speech
- Unusual breathing patterns
- Ringing or deafness in one or both ears
- Having a seizure or fit (when your body suddenly moves uncontrollably)

After a minor head injury, your child may well cry or be distressed. This is quite normal as with attention and reassurance, most children will settle down. However, if your child continues to be distressed, you should seek medical assistance.

Causes

Children are very active and often have little sense of danger, which is why most children will have some kind of head injury while they are growing up. Falls from cots, windows, stairs, trees and playground equipment are just some of the more common ways for children to experience an injury to the head. Head injuries in children may also be the result of cycling accidents. Other causes of minor head injuries in young people and adults include accidents at home, sports-related injuries, and accidents at work (e.g. falls).

Treatment

After a minor head injury, you should rest and not take part in any strenuous activity for 48 hours. Do not drink alcohol or take any medication that helps you to sleep. Although one of the symptoms of a severe head injury is increasing drowsiness, this does not mean you cannot let your child sleep following a bang or knock to the head. Increasing drowsiness means that your child will become increasingly difficult to rouse and will be very

unresponsive. If your child is simply tired from the stress of the situation, or from crying, then it is fine to let them sleep.

If your child received their head injury before bed time, they will be naturally sleepy and tired. If you are concerned in any way about their drowsiness, then make sure you wake your child an hour after they go to sleep. Check that they are still responsive and that their breathing pattern and position are normal. You should continue to wake your child at regular intervals throughout the night.

If at any stage, you are unable to wake your child, dial 999 for an emergency ambulance.

Painkillers

If you experience a headache or mild discomfort after a head injury, then it is safe for you to take a painkilling medicine, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen. Ibuprofen is not suitable for those with asthma or breathing problems. Never take aspirin following a head injury, as it thins the blood and could increase any bleeding.

If your child requires pain relief, make sure that you give them painkilling medicine which has been specially formulated for children. Liquid paracetamol is safe to use. Children and babies over two months old, who weigh over 4kg (9lb), and were not born premature (before 37 weeks), can be given liquid paracetamol. You should always make sure that you follow the dosage instructions on the packet.

Children over one year old can have ibuprofen as long as they weigh over 7kg (15lb), and do not have a history of asthma, heart problems, kidney problems, stomach ulcers or indigestion.

Never give aspirin to children under 16, especially following a head injury.

Prevention

Many knocks and bumps to the head are the result of accidents that would be very difficult to predict or prevent but there are some steps you can take to reduce your risk of brain damage if you have a head injury.

Cyclists can protect themselves by wearing properly fitting safety helmets. Safety helmets can dramatically reduce the risk of serious head injury in an accident. When cycling you should always wear a properly fitting safety helmet. Cycling helmets are designed to absorb the force of impact evenly, which stops one part of the head taking all the impact. You should make sure that your child knows the importance of wearing a cycle helmet every time they ride a bike and also make sure that bicycle lights are used when cycling at night.

Following sensible health and safety guidance, accidents at work and in the home, can be prevented. For example, to keep toddlers and young children safe you should aim to 'childproof' your home. To childproof your home, you can take the following steps:

- Check that windows are lockable, and cannot be opened by your child. This is especially important for the windows in your child's bedroom.
- Move furniture such as beds, sofas and chairs away from the windows, to prevent your child climbing up and falling out.
- Make sure everything breakable and dangerous is out of your child's reach. You can buy corner guards to cover any sharp edges of furniture and fit safety gates at the top and bottom of the stairs.
- To reduce the risk of head injury at work, you should always follow any necessary health and safety guidance.
- Make sure that you wear any necessary safety equipment when playing sports, particularly contact sports.