

## Don't Be a Thick-Headed Athlete

Concussions should be taken seriously. *by Bill Romaniello*

The term “concussion” is heard quite often, but it’s worth redefining. A concussion is a mild injury to the brain due to a direct blow or sudden stop that causes the brain to collide with the skull. Signs and symptoms of a concussion include loss of consciousness, headache, loss of memory, nausea, dizziness, change in mood, irritability, and the feeling of being emotionally and physically drained.

Education is an important part of helping athletes avoid sustaining a concussion. Preventing a concussion is not an easy task. There are certain teachable techniques in sports, however, that will help protect an athlete. Take football for example. When an athlete employs the proper hitting technique, chances of sustaining a concussion are reduced. For one thing, a football athlete should never hit with the head.

Another important strategy for concussion prevention and treatment is teaching athletes to be truthful and honest. Athletes of all ages must tell a parent, a coach, or an athletic trainer when a blow to the head has been sustained, especially if any of the signs or symptoms of a concussion are present—no matter how minor those symptoms may seem. A single concussive episode can be resolved with minimal damage and time loss. Recent studies show, however, that multiple incidents in the same day or over the course of just a few



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days can have drastic consequences. It’s better to acknowledge and address symptoms of concussion early than risk additional damage.

### Treatment of a Concussion

The current protocols recommend that any athlete who has a headache—or any symptoms of a concussion, for that matter—be removed from sport activities immediately. It is also recommended that these athletes be seen by a certified or licensed health care professional, such as the family physician or a certified athletic trainer. Most health care professionals will recommend extensive cognitive rest, cutting out such things as sports activities and the use of electronic devices and reducing such things as school work, reading, and writing.

One of the hardest aspects in concussion management is deciding when an athlete can return to

play/practice. It is recommended that athletes be symptom free for five to seven days before returning to sport activities. Once symptom-free, the return should be slow and gradual. A light jog or simple calisthenics on day one; for example, progressing to more moderate exercises and non-contact drills on days two, three, and four. Eventually, contact/hitting and heavy exercise can be eased into, perhaps by days five, six, or seven. No athlete should return to play on the same day of injury. A protocol that includes multiple days of rest and a gradual return will insure the best outcome.

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