

Concussion Awareness for Coaches: Quick Summary

- Concussions, unlike physical injuries, are not always obvious.
- Returning to play with a concussion may result in severe and permanent brain damage.
- Youth participating in contact sports are particularly susceptible to concussions.
- As coaches, we need to be able to identify a suspected concussion, alert the parents, and respect their return-to-play plan.
- There is an app called “Concussion Recognition & Response: Coach & Parent Version” that can help identify a possible concussion.
- Anyone with a suspected concussion should see a medical professional before returning to play.

Why Concussion Awareness is Important

First, unlike a physical injury on the body, **an injury to the brain is not always obvious**. The signs and symptoms of concussion are wide-ranging and varied, do not necessarily include loss of consciousness, and frankly can be quite vague. It is easy to miss the signs of concussion if you are not aware of them.

Second, **returning to play prior to complete recovery from a concussion may result in severe and permanent brain damage**. Even after complete recovery, a second concussion within weeks or months of the first may result in significantly prolonged recovery.

Currently there is a lot of *awareness* about concussions, but not a lot of *knowledge* about how to identify a suspected concussion and the necessity of staying off the field until recovery is complete.

What is a Concussion?

A concussion is a minor traumatic brain injury (TBI) that occurs when the head hits an object, or a moving object strikes the head, causing the brain to move rapidly inside the skull. Even a “ding,” “getting your bell rung,” or what seems to be a mild bump or blow to the head can be serious. Concussions can also result from a fall or from players colliding with each other or with obstacles, such as a goalpost.

Concussion Signs & Symptoms

It may be very obvious that someone has sustained a concussion (i.e., loss of consciousness, vomiting), or symptoms may appear in a more subtle way over the course of hours or weeks. The following summary of concussion signs and symptoms is provided by the SCORE (Safe Concussion Outcome Recovery & Education) Concussion program at Children’s National Medical Center.

Signs & Symptoms

- All concussions are serious
- Most concussions occur *without* loss of consciousness
- Recognition and proper response to concussions when they first occur can help prevent further injury
- **When in doubt, sit them out**

Signs Observed by Coaches / Parents	Symptoms Reported by Athlete
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appears dazed or stunned (such as glassy eyes) • Is confused about assignment or position • Forgets an instruction or play • Is unsure of score or opponent • Moves clumsily or poor balance • Answers questions slowly • Loses consciousness (<i>even briefly</i>) • Shows mood, behavior, or personality changes • Can't recall events <i>prior</i> to hit or fall • Can't recall events <i>after</i> hit or fall 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headache or "pressure" in head • Nausea or vomiting • Balance problems or dizziness • Double or blurry vision • Sensitivity to light or noise • Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy • Concentration or memory problems • Confusion • Feeling more emotional, nervous, or anxious • Does not "feel right" or is "feeling down"

The Role of the Coach

If you suspect that your athlete has a concussion, you should keep the athlete out of the game or practice and alert their parents immediately. **Any athlete with a suspected concussion should be evaluated by a medical professional with experience in concussions before returning to play.**

The Director of the SCORE Concussion program developed an app to help youth coaches recognize and respond to concussions. **The app is called "Concussion Recognition & Response: Coach & Parent Version"** and is available for iPhone and Android for \$0.99.

Within the app, coaches answer basic questions about the signs (what they observe) and symptoms (what an injured athlete reports) to determine if the athlete has suffered a suspected concussion and how to respond. Additionally, an email interface allows detailed information taken on the field to be sent immediately to the athlete's parents and physician.

Following a concussion, the athlete's parents will develop a return-to-play plan in coordination with their medical provider. It is of critical importance that we, as coaches, respect the plan as provided. The length of time needed for recovery can vary greatly, from weeks to months, depending on the severity of the concussion.

Risks of Returning to Play Too Soon

A child or teen who returns to practice or play when he or she still has symptoms is at significant risk for a more severe or potentially catastrophic injury.

Second-Impact Syndrome (SIS) can occur when a person suffers a second concussion before symptoms from an earlier one have subsided, and results in severe disability or death. Children and teens are particularly susceptible to SIS, and the occurrence of SIS is not dependent on the severity of the initial concussion. Concussion symptoms typically take several weeks to subside and it's therefore of utmost importance that the athlete does not return to play during this time.

Even after concussion symptoms have fully subsided, a second concussion within weeks or even months of the initial injury will result in a greatly prolonged recovery period. For this reason, medical professionals recommend a gradual return-to-play plan, beginning with mild jogging and progressing over a period of several weeks to individual drills, then limited contact drills, and finally to scrimmage and full play.