

Max Guarniere and John Sampa at our football photo shoot

CONCUSSION Care for Katy Athletes



Spotting the Symptoms of a Concussion & Important Steps to Take *By Andy E. Shen, MD*

Although most concussions happen to older athletes, younger kids are also at risk



Katy youth baseball players show off their team pride



A West Houston Cannons Lacrosse league match



It's a no-brainer. Kids who are involved in athletics either at school or in community leagues are happier and healthier. But at the same time, there's growing concern over the increasing rate of concussions among student athletes. In fact, according to a study published in the *Journal of Athletic Training*, an estimated 300,000 high school athletes suffer concussions every year in the U.S.

Concussions are considered to be a traumatic brain injury, and it doesn't take much for it to happen. There's not a lot of space between the brain and the skull, so anything that jostles or shakes the brain can quite easily lead to a concussion. That being said, there are no imaging studies that will confirm a concussion diagnosis, which is why it's important that Katy parents and coaches are familiar with the symptoms.

Concussion Concerns

Most people think that if there has not been a loss of consciousness, there's not a concussion. But that's not true. According to the Centers for Disease Control, most concussions occur without loss of consciousness. Symptoms of concussion include an injury-related headache, pressure in the head, nausea or vomiting, balance problems or dizziness, double or blurry vision, excessive lethargy or sleepiness, memory problems, and confusion.

It's important to note that some of these symptoms might not appear for a few days or even weeks after the injury, necessitating a wait-and-see approach. A concussion in and of itself is not life-threatening, but a brain bleed is.

Recognizing a Brain Bleed

If you suspect a brain bleed, forget the wait-and-see approach and seek emergency care immediately. The only way to check for a brain bleed is to undergo a CT scan. Symptoms almost always come on suddenly, but do vary based on where in the brain the bleed has occurred.

Things to watch for are difficulty with breathing, speaking, or swallowing, loss of consciousness, and seizures.

A New Game Plan

The University Interscholastic League (UIL) recently approved new rules specific to the management of concussions. The rules, which will take effect during the 2011-2012 school year, state that high school students in Texas cannot return to competition the same day they sustain a concussion, and an athlete who is suspected of having a concussion must be evaluated by a licensed healthcare professional.

As a precaution, coaches should never allow an athlete to return to play until receiving clearance from a physician. In fact, until the recent UIL rule changes, athletes were allowed to get back in the game if they were symptom-free for 15 minutes after a hit to the head.

Taking a Break to Recover

For the most part, everyone will recover from a concussion. In fact, 80% recover within three weeks. Younger kids, though, including those in middle school and high school, take longer to recover simply due to the maturity level of their brain. While a rest period from sports is a given, some students might also require a rest period from school. Trying to concentrate on school work, watching TV, and even playing video games can make concussion symptoms worse.

Think of it this way: When you pull a muscle or strain a tendon, you stop doing whatever it was that caused the injury until it heals. The same logic applies to the brain. It's important for Katy parents to talk to their child's coach, request a baseline IMPACT study, recognize the symptoms of concussions and brain bleeds, and most of all, listen to their gut feeling. If your kid takes a knock to the noggin, and you're just not sure, don't hesitate. Seek immediate medical attention. **KM**

ANDY E. SHEN, MD, enjoys serving the Katy community as a physician with Memorial Hermann Family and Sports Medicine.



Common Concussion Symptoms

- An injury-related headache
- Balance problems or dizziness
- Double or blurry vision
- Excessive lethargy or sleepiness
- Memory problems and confusion
- Nausea or vomiting
- Pressure in the head

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