

# AFTER A MILD HEAD INJURY OR CONCUSSION TODDLER

EDUCATION FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS



ILLINOIS EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

March 2009



Illinois EMSC is a collaborative program between the Illinois Department of Public Health and Loyola University Medical Center. Development of this presentation was supported in part by: Grant 5 H34 MC 00096 from the Department of Health and Human Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau.



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# AFTER A MILD HEAD INJURY OR CONCUSSION TODDLER

Your toddler, \_\_\_\_\_, was seen in the Emergency Department for a mild head injury or concussion. A mild head injury or concussion is an injury to the tissues or blood vessels of the brain. Common causes of mild head injuries include: falls, bicycle crashes, motor vehicle crashes, forceful shaking, or sports injuries. A mild head injury/concussion can cause the brain to have trouble working normally for a short time. Your toddler might have a big lump even if it was a minor injury because there is a large blood supply to the scalp. Your toddler may have suffered cuts, scrapes, abrasions, broken bones, eye injuries, and headaches. He/she may have been unconscious (“knocked out”) for a short time.

A mild head injury/concussion is common in childhood, and is usually *not* a serious problem. The doctor who examined and treated your toddler did not find any brain or nerve damage. However, problems can show up later.

*You will need to watch your toddler closely for the next several days and weeks for more serious signs of getting worse.*

**Please tell the doctors and nurses in the Emergency Department before leaving if you feel you cannot do this.**

**IMMEDIATELY go back to the Emergency Department or see your doctor if your toddler shows any of these symptoms:**

- Cannot be woken up.
- Faints or gets very sleepy.
- Vomits/throws up more than 2 times and/or has forceful (projectile) vomiting.
- Acts confused (has trouble saying words/sounds that used to be common, doesn't know who you are, etc.).
- Shows drastic changes in behavior or personality (irritable/moody, aggressive, sad, etc.).
- Has a very bad headache that is not helped by pain medication.
- Cannot move parts of his/her body.
- Has a seizure (twitching or jerking movement of part(s) of the body; may look stiff).
- Pupils are *not* the same size in both eyes (black part in the center of the eye).
- Has changes in vision (blurred or double vision; appears to have trouble seeing).
- Shows sensitivity/pain to bright lights.
- Has bloody or clear fluid from the nose or ears.
- Shows weakness in the arms and/or legs (has problems with balance/walking/crawling).
- Seems to be getting worse instead of better.

**In an Emergency, call \_\_\_\_\_**

### After a mild head injury/concussion, your toddler might:

- Be sleepy. It's OK to let him/her sleep. Your toddler should be able to wake easily and act normally
  - If he/she acts normally when woken up at night its OK to let him/her go right back to sleep.
- Vomit (throw up) the first few hours after the head injury.
- Have an upset stomach.
- Have mild or moderate headaches; may have a stiff neck
  - Give pain medication (acetaminophen) if your doctor says it is OK to do so.

**Read the label for the correct dose for your toddler.**

- Feel dizzy from time to time or have a small loss of balance.
- Be more irritable, cranky or moody.
- Show changes in the way he/she plays.
- Show changes in sleeping and eating patterns.
- Temporarily lose the ability to do newly learned skills (for example: toilet training).
- Have a shorter attention span.

### Things to do after you leave the Emergency Department:

Call your toddler's doctor **tomorrow** to make a follow up appointment within a week.

Wake your toddler up every \_\_\_\_\_ hours for the next \_\_\_\_\_ hours.

Look for any changes in alertness, personality, or behavior.

**Apply Ice:** Sometimes the head injury may cause bruising, swelling, or a cut to your toddler's skin. Your doctor may suggest that you apply ice (or a cold, damp cloth) to decrease the swelling and pain. Start using ice right after the injury and up to 24 - 48 hours afterwards. **Do not** put ice directly on the skin, or for longer than 20 minutes at a time to avoid frostbite.

**Insist on Rest:** Have your toddler play quietly for the first 24 hours. Have your toddler restart normal activities after he/she feels better. **NO ROUGH PLAY!!**

**Return to Sports/Rough Play:** *Your toddler MAY NOT return to rough play activities until your family's doctor examines him/her and says it is safe to do so.*

### Additional Follow-up Instructions:

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*KEEP ALL OF YOUR TODDLER'S  
APPOINTMENTS*

### Your toddler's medications are:

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- Write down all medications your toddler takes, the amounts, and when and why they are taken.
  - Bring the list of the medications (or the pill bottles) when you visit your doctor. Ask your doctor for more information about the medications.
- Always follow the medication directions your doctor gives you. Call your doctor if you think the medications are not helping or your toddler is having health problems because of the medicine. **Do not stop giving the medications to your toddler until you discuss it with your doctor.**
- **Never give aspirin to your toddler** without first asking your doctor. Giving aspirin may cause a very serious illness called Reye's syndrome. Read medication labels to see if your toddler's medication contains aspirin.

**DO NOT** give any other medicines to your toddler without asking your family's doctor first (including prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbs, or food supplements).

### At your follow-up visit and afterwards:

- Let your toddler's caregivers/daycare providers know he/she had a head injury.
- Let your doctor know if your toddler has trouble doing things he/she was able to do before the injury.
- If your toddler continues to show behavioral or personality changes that last for one month after the injury, talk to your doctor about making an appointment with a Pediatric Rehabilitation doctor.

### Prevent future head injuries:

- Use the proper toddler passenger restraint (car seat or booster seat) for the age and size of your child.
- Have your toddler wear a properly fitted helmet when using anything on wheels – bicycle, scooter, etc.
- Toddlers should play where it is safe and supervised by a responsible adult.
- Prevent falls, choking, poisoning, and burns in the home. Check your home for possible dangers and use safety products (for example, safety gates, cabinet locks, wall anchors for furniture/TV to avoid tipping, window guards, smoke detectors, etc.).

*It is very important to protect your toddler from another head injury before he/she has recovered from the 1<sup>st</sup> one.*

*Each head injury your toddler has increases the risk of having serious problems later in life (such as poor coordination, poor concentration, and trouble thinking).*

**REPEATED HEAD INJURIES CAN BE  
LIFE THREATENING.**

*Your toddler **must not** be involved in rough play until your doctor says it is safe to do so.*

**For more information about mild head injuries and how to prevent future injuries:**

Bicycle Safety Institute  
[www.helmets.org](http://www.helmets.org)

Brain Injury Association (BIA)  
National Resource Line: (800)-699-6443  
[www.biausa.org](http://www.biausa.org)

Brain Injury Association of Illinois  
Illinois Resource Line: (312)-726-5699  
[www.biaill.org](http://www.biaill.org)

Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh  
[www.chp.edu/CHP/besafe](http://www.chp.edu/CHP/besafe)

Heads Up: Concussion in High School Sports  
[http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/tbi/coaches\\_tool\\_kit.htm#](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/tbi/coaches_tool_kit.htm#)

Illinois – area car seat installation experts  
[www.buckleupillinois.org](http://www.buckleupillinois.org)

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (CDC)  
[www.cdc.gov/ncipc/tbi/TBI.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/tbi/TBI.htm)

TIPP Injury Prevention Program (AAP)  
[www.aap.org/family/tippmain.htm](http://www.aap.org/family/tippmain.htm)

References:

- Fung, M, Willer, B, Moreland, D, Leddy JJ. A proposal for an evidenced-based emergency department discharge form for mild traumatic brain injury. *Brain Injury*, 2006;20(9):889-894.
- Kamerling SN, Lutz N, Posner JC, Vanore M. Mild traumatic brain injury in children: practice guidelines for emergency department and hospitalized patients. *Pediatr Emerg Care*. 2003;19(6):431-40.
- OSF St. Anthony Medical Center – Emergency Department (Rockford, IL) Discharge Instructions (portion from LOGICARE Corporation)
- Thompson MICROMEDEZ® CareNotes™ System ([www.thompsonhc.com](http://www.thompsonhc.com))