

Appendix 1.4

Brain Injury Advice Cards - Short Versions: Example # 1



For more information about concussion, please visit:
www.cdc.gov/Concussion.

PATIENT INSTRUCTIONS

You have been examined at _____
[name of hospital emergency department]
for a head injury and possible concussion. Be sure to let a family member or friend know about your injury. They may notice symptoms before you do and can help you.

Take time off from work or school for _____ days or until you and your doctor think you are able to return to your usual routine.

Your next appointment with _____
[Doctor's name]
is _____
[date and time]

What to Expect Once You're Home from the Hospital

Most people with a concussion recover quickly and fully. During recovery, you may have a range of symptoms that appear right away, while others may not be noticed for hours or even days after the injury. You may not realize you have problems until you try to do your usual activities again. Most symptoms go away over time without any treatment. Below is a list of some of the symptoms you may have:



Thinking/Remembering

- Difficulty thinking clearly ■ Feeling slowed down
- Trouble concentrating ■ Difficulty remembering new information



Physical

- Headache ■ Balance problems ■ Blurred vision ■ Dizziness
- Nausea or vomiting ■ Lack of energy ■ Sensitivity to noise or light



Emotional/Mood

- Irritability ■ Nervousness ■ Sadness ■ More emotional



Sleep

- Sleeping more than usual ■ Sleeping less than usual ■ Trouble falling asleep

How to Feel Better

- Get plenty of rest and sleep.
- Avoid activities that are physically demanding or require a lot of thinking.
- Do not drink alcohol.
- Return slowly and gradually to your routine.
- Ask a doctor when it is safe to drive, ride a bike, or operate heavy equipment.

WHEN TO RETURN TO THE HOSPITAL

Sometimes serious problems develop after a head injury. Return to the emergency department right away if you have any of these symptoms:

- Repeated vomiting
- Worsening or severe headache
- Unable to stay awake during times you would normally be awake
- More confused and restless
- Seizures
- Difficulty walking or difficulty with balance
- Difficulty with your vision
- Any symptom that concerns you, your family members, or friends

Appendix 1.4 (Continued)

Brain Injury Advice Cards - Short Versions: Example # 2

Brain Injury Advice Card (Short Version)

Important Points about Mild Brain Injury

- You had a mild brain injury or what is sometimes called a concussion. Most people recover quickly following a mild brain injury/concussion. A few people may experience symptoms over a longer period.
- There is a small risk of you developing serious complications so you should be watched closely by another adult for 24 hours after the accident.
- Please read the following. It outlines what signs to look for after a brain injury and what you need to do if you have problems.

Warning Signs

If you show any of these symptoms or signs after your brain injury/concussion, or you get worse, go to the nearest hospital, doctor or call 911 immediately.

- Fainting or blacking out, drowsiness, or can't be woken up
- A constant severe headache or a headache that gets worse
- Vomiting or throwing up more than twice
- Cannot remember new events, recognise people or places (increased confusion)
- Acting strange, saying things that do not make sense (change in behaviour)
- Having a seizure (any jerking of the body or limbs)
- Inability to move parts of your body, weakness in arms or legs, or clumsiness
- Blurred vision or slurred speech
- Being unsteady on your feet or loss of balance
- Continual fluid or bleeding from the ear or nose

The First 24-48 Hours After Injury

- **Warning Signs:** You should be observed and return to hospital if you develop any of the above warning signs.
- **Rest/Sleeping:** Rest (both physical and mental) and avoid strenuous activity for at least 24 hours. It is alright for you to sleep tonight but you should be checked every four hours by someone to make sure you are alright.
- **Driving:** Do not drive for at least 24 hours. You should not drive until you feel much better and can concentrate properly. Talk to your doctor.
- **Drinking/Drugs:** Do not drink alcohol or take sleeping pills or recreational drugs in the next 48 hours. All of these can make you feel worse. They also make it hard for other people to tell whether the injury is affecting you or not.
- **Pain Relief:** Use **acetaminophen** or **acetaminophen/codeine** for headaches (e.g., Tylenol).
- **Sports:** Do not return to sports until you have received medical clearance from a healthcare professional.

See your primary care provider or visit the ED if you are not starting to feel better within a few days of your injury.

The First 4 Weeks After Injury

You may have some common effects from the brain injury/concussion which usually resolve in several weeks to three months. These are called **post-concussion symptoms** (see below). Tiredness can exaggerate the symptoms. Return to your normal activities gradually (not all at once) during the first weeks or months. **You can help yourself get better by:**

- **Rest/Sleeping:** Your brain needs time to recover. It is important to get adequate amounts of sleep as you may feel more tired than normal and you need to get adequate amounts of both physical and mental rest.
- **Driving:** Do not drive or operate machinery until you feel much better and can concentrate properly. Talk to your doctor.
- **Drinking/Drugs:** Do not drink alcohol or use recreational drugs until you are fully recovered. They will make you feel much worse. Do not take medication unless advised by your doctor.
- **Work/Study:** You may need to take time off work or study until you can concentrate better. Most people need a day or two off work but are back full-time in less than 2 weeks. How much time you need off work or study will depend on the type of job you do. See your doctor and let your employer or teachers know if you are having problems at work or with study. You may need to return to study or work gradually.
- **Sport/Lifestyle:** It is dangerous for the brain to be injured again if it has not recovered from the first injury. Talk to your doctor about the steps you need to take to gradually increase sports activity and return to play. If in doubt, sit out.
- **Relationships:** Sometimes your symptoms will affect your relationship with family and friends. You may suffer irritability and mood swings. See your doctor if you or your family are worried.

Recovery

- You should start to feel better within a few days and be 'back to normal' within about 4 weeks. See your local doctor if you are not starting to feel better.
- Your doctor will monitor these symptoms and may refer you to a specialist if you do not improve over 4 weeks up to 3 months.

Information included on this advice card was adapted from the Motor Accidents Authority of NSW, Guidelines for Mild Traumatic Brain Injury following Closed Head Injury (MAA NSW, 2008) and the Information about Mild Head Injury or Concussion booklet (Ponsford, Willmott, Nelms & Curran, 2004).