

HEALTH FACTS SERIES

Head Injury: Symptoms & Precautions

What is a head injury?



A head injury is a blow to the head that may make you “see stars”, lose consciousness, or induce loss of memory. Head injuries range from bumps and scrapes to scalp lacerations, skull fractures, concussions, and other injuries to the brain.

Head injuries can be **potentially serious**, therefore extreme caution is advised.

The major concern in a head injury is the possibility of bleeding inside the skull. An accumulation of blood inside the skull would eventually put pressure on the brain, causing some degree of damage. *Careful observation* is the most valuable tool in assessing the severity of any head injury. It should be noted that since internal bleeding is an uncommon occurrence, there is *no reason for panic* when dealing with a head injury. Attentive compliance with the simple guidelines offered below will help alleviate unnecessary concern.

When is a head injury serious?

Call **486-4700** or return to the Health Service **immediately** if the injured person exhibits any of the following symptoms:

- ◆ Nausea and/or vomiting
- ◆ Increasing lethargy or a tendency to fall into an abnormally deep sleep
- ◆ Difficulty with breathing or balance
- ◆ Visual difficulties
- ◆ Unequal pupil size (i.e., one pupil larger than other)
- ◆ Increasingly intense headaches or headaches which persist longer than 24 hours following the injury
- ◆ Loss of recent memory
- ◆ Drainage of blood or clear fluid from the nose, ears, or mouth
- ◆ Convulsions or seizures
- ◆ Unusual irritability, drowsiness, confusion, or other definite changes in behavior (these changes may occur up to one month or more, following the injury)
- ◆ Black eyes or blackness behind ears
- ◆ Irregular heart rate

How is a head injury treated?

The injured person needs to be awakened and checked every two to three hours during the first 24 hour period following the injury. During this period of time, the injured person should:

- ◆ Avoid strenuous activity.
- ◆ Eat a light diet or drink clear fluids for the first 12 to 24 hours following injury.
- ◆ Avoid alcoholic beverages since the alcohol may mask some serious symptoms.
- ◆ Take nothing stronger than aspirin or acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol) for headache, as other medications may be dangerous.



For more information or to make an appointment, call Student Health Services, 486-2719.

Practitioner Instructions: