

Patient information

Advice for carers of people 16 and over with a head injury in the community

The early intervention team have assessed the head injury of the friend, relative or client you are caring for and it's very unlikely to cause worrying symptoms in the coming days.

- Do not leave them alone for the first 24 hours after the injury. Also, make sure there is a telephone nearby for the first 24 to 48 hours in case you need to access emergency medical help.
- They should not drive, cycle or operate machinery until they feel completely better. You can ask their doctor for advice about this.

When to call 999 or attend hospital

Take them to their nearest hospital emergency department as soon as possible, if they develop any of these symptoms:

- Unconsciousness, or lack of full consciousness (for example, problems keeping their eyes open)
- Drowsiness (feeling sleepy) that lasts longer than 1 hour when they would normally be wide awake
- Difficulty waking them up
- Problems understanding or speaking
- Loss of orientation (such as knowing where they are, what time of day it is, who they're with and what's going on around them)
- Loss of balance or problems walking
- Weakness in one or more of their arms or legs
- Problems with their eyesight
- A painful headache that will not go away
- Being sick
- Seizures (also called convulsions or fits)

- Clear fluid coming out of their ears or nose
- Bleeding from one or both ears.

Symptoms not usually of concern

The person you are caring for may develop other symptoms over the next few days that should disappear in the next 2 weeks without the need for treatment in hospital. These include:

- A mild headache
- Feeling sick (without being sick)
- Dizziness
- Irritability or bad temper
- Problems concentrating
- Problems with memory
- Tiredness
- Lack of appetite
- Problems sleeping.

You should take them to see their doctor if:

- You're very concerned about any of these symptoms in the first few days after they have left hospital
- The symptoms have not gone away after 2 weeks.

What can help after a head injury?

Make sure the person rests for 2 to 3 days. Then, they can gradually return to normal activities, such as school, college or work. Be guided by their symptoms. If their symptoms get worse, they should go back to a level of activity that was manageable.

They can slowly return to light, non-contact exercise, gradually stepping up the amount and intensity of the exercise until they reach their normal exercise routine. This may take a few weeks.

Avoid any contact sports, such as football, rugby, boxing or martial arts, for at least 3 weeks, and until a healthcare practitioner has confirmed that they have completely recovered. If they've been told they have a skull fracture, try to minimise the risk of further head injuries by, for example, avoiding contact sports for 4 to 6 weeks. They must not take any alcohol or illegal drugs.

They must not take sleeping pills, sedatives or tranquilisers unless a doctor has prescribed them.

Long-term problems

Most people recover quickly from a head injury and do not have any long-term problems. But a few people take longer to recover or develop problems after weeks or months. These problems could include fatigue and dizziness, or problems with coordination, memory or sight. This is sometimes called post-concussion syndrome. A few people develop problems with their hormones after a head injury. For example, the levels of sex hormones can fall. This can cause hot flushes, fatigue, loss of body hair, reduced sex drive, irregular periods, erectile dysfunction and reduced fertility. These may occur several months after the injury.

Make sure the patient sees their doctor as soon as possible if they have any of these problems and they do not get better within 2 weeks.

You can find further support and information about long-term problems after a head injury on the Headway website.

Telephone number for further advice:

NHS 111 can help if you need urgent medical help, your GP's surgery is closed or you're not sure what to do. Telephone 111.

NICE National Institute for
Health and Care Excellence

© National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2022. 'Head injury', NICE guideline xxx. London (available at: www.guidance.nice.org.uk/NGxxx) This resource is an implementation tool and should be used alongside the published guidance. The information does not supersede or replace the guidance.

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities, please visit the website for AccessAble (formerly DisabledGo)

<https://www.accessable.co.uk>



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