

Minor head injury

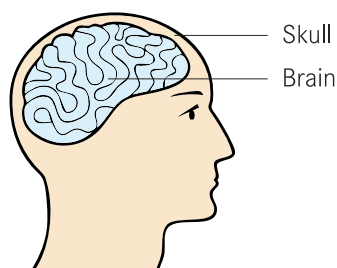
What is a minor head injury?

The most common type of minor head injury is concussion. Concussion may be associated with loss of consciousness ('a blackout'). This is often brief and is normally followed by a rapid and complete recovery.

What causes a minor head injury?

The skull and facial bones are hard and they protect the brain, which is soft. If these bones are injured then the brain becomes more vulnerable.

When someone has a knock to the head, their brain moves about and can hit the skull and facial bones, which may cause bruising and cause a person to 'black out'. Sometimes there can be a skull fracture (although this is rare with a mild head injury).



What are the symptoms?

A person with a minor head injury may have bruising, swelling and bleeding anywhere around or inside the brain. These symptoms will vary, depending on how the injury happened.

Some people will 'black out' for a short period. Headache or pain is common. Some people are confused about where they are and what has happened.

Treatment

While in the emergency department, the injured person will be closely monitored and may have:

- mild painkillers for headache or pain
- the person may be fasted – nothing to eat or drink until further advised
- anti-nausea tablets for any nausea or vomiting
- a CT scan of the brain, neck or bones (if needed)
- an x-ray of the neck if there is neck pain or a suspicion of neck injury
- a hard collar on their neck and be laying flat, to prevent them from moving their head, so protecting their spine.

If the injury is mild, they will be sent home with family or friends. Please ask for a certificate for work if needed.

Home care

- Rest quietly for the day.
- Use 'ice packs' over swollen or painful areas. To do this wrap ice cubes, frozen peas or a sports ice pack in a towel. Do not put ice directly on the skin.
- Take simple painkillers (such as paracetamol) for any headache. Check the packet for the right dose and use only as directed.

Some injured people may be confused or 'groggy', and need care and supervision over the following 24 hours.

If an injured person is discharged from hospital in the evening, make sure they are woken several times during the night. Set the alarm. Ensure the injured person walks to the toilet or does an activity that allows you to assess their coordination.

- **Do not** let the injured person drive home.
- **Do not** leave them alone for the next 24 hours.
- **Do not** let them drink alcohol for at least 24 hours.
- **Do not** let them eat or drink for the first six to 12 hours (unless advised otherwise by the doctor). Then offer them food and drink in moderation.
- **Do not** let them take sedatives or other medication unless instructed.

What to expect

Many people cannot remember events before or after their head injury (*amnesia*).

It can take some time for the brain to recover. During this time headaches and mild cognitive problems (such as difficulty concentrating, remembering things, performing complex tasks, and mood changes) are common. It is also normal to feel more tired than usual.

Most people make a full recovery and the symptoms last only a few days. There is no specific treatment other than plenty of rest.



Minor head injury

Do not return to work or school until fully recovered.

The length of time depends on the type of work or study and the severity of the head injury. Ask your local doctor for advice.

Do not return to sport until all symptoms have gone. This is because your reaction times and thinking will often be slower, putting you at risk of further injury. It is important to avoid another head injury before fully recovering from the first, as a second injury can cause additional damage.

Some people will have ongoing problems. If this is the case, see your local doctor.

Notes:

Seeking help



In a **medical emergency** go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance (dial 000). Do this if the injured person:

- repeatedly vomits
- 'blacks out'
- has a seizure (fit)
- cannot be woken or is not responsive.



For other medical problems see your local doctor or health care professional.



For health advice from a Registered Nurse you can call **NURSE-ON-CALL 24 hours a day** on **1300 60 60 24** for the cost of a local call from anywhere in Victoria.*

NURSE-ON-CALL provides access to **interpreting services** for callers not confident with English. Call **1300 60 60 24**.

*Calls from mobile calls may be charged at a higher rate



Want to know more?

- Ask your local doctor or health care professional.
- Visit the **Better Health Channel** www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

If you would like to receive this publication in an **accessible format**, please phone 9096 8064 or email edfactsheets@dhs.vic.gov.au

June 2008. Also available online at www.health.vic.gov.au/edfactsheets

Disclaimer: This health information is for general education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for you.