

# On-field Head Injuries



Head injuries are amongst the most challenging situations that trainers and doctors face on the sports field. Once you realise that "challenging" is doctor-speak for "terrifying" then you realise that most of us dread the head on impact. The important thing to realise though is that like most things, if you take the situation one step at a time, and continually re-evaluate the player, you won't miss anything.

Once a player is down, the first thing is to assess the level of consciousness. If the player is unconscious, then he or she should be removed from the field of play on a stretcher, with the neck immobilised. and taken to hospital for further investigation and evaluation.

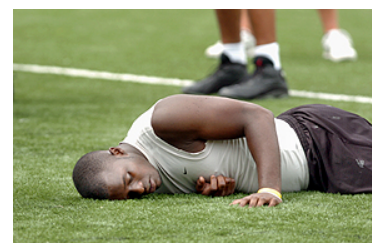
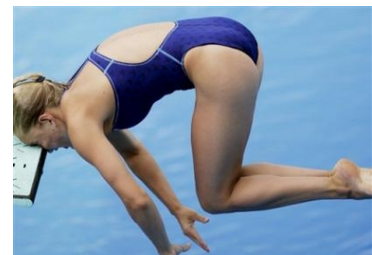
If the player has been knocked out but is recovering consciousness, then neurological evaluation starts immediately, with simple questions of orientation in time and place, and memory of the incident. Often the player will be dazed and due to the adrenaline rush and the normal human desire/ instinct to shrug off injury, will try to get up.

If they have been unconscious for any length of time, this should be resisted in a firm calm voice, and help requested in getting them off the field on a stretcher. Observation continues once off the field, with special attention to any scalp laceration or bruising, damage to any facial bones, or bleeding from mouth, nose or ears. These may indicate more serious underlying damage. It is also important to exclude spinal injury by checking ability to move arms and legs and presence of sensation in all limbs. It is important to try to get an accurate history of the incident from the player and surrounding people.

Whether a player needs to go to hospital for further investigation and observation after a concussion, depends on several factors i.e. loss of consciousness for more than 5 minutes, any focal neurological signs eg double vision, cerebral irritation (eg excessive agitation or aggression, not accepting reasonable requests etc) for longer than an hour, deterioration in mental state eg drowsiness after being alert, or vomiting. Even if the player does not need to go to hospital, they should be monitored repeatedly during the afternoon, for any changes in their condition, and only allowed to go home with a responsible person, who is given instructions on the need for review if the player's condition changes.

Whatever the player may urge, he or she should not be allowed back on the field after a concussion during the game. The potential for another head injury due to slowed reflexes and responses is high.

In summary – in severe head injuries, keep them safe from further injury by protecting their airway and spine and get them off to medical care and hospital as soon as possible. In concussion, get them off the field and keep them safe continually reassess their state, and get medical help for neurological assessment as soon as possible. Don't let them keep playing, and get medical clearance before they start training again.



## Wakefield Sports Clinic

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