

PATIENT INFORMATION

Minor Head Injuries in Children

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Almost all children bump their heads, every now and then. While these injuries can be upsetting, most head injuries are minor and do not cause serious problems. In very rare cases, problems can occur after a minor bump on the head.

This information is for children, who:

- Were well before the injury
- Act normally, *after* the injury

This information is not intended for children who:

- Are younger than two years of age.
- Have possible neck injuries.
- Already have nervous-system problems, such as seizures or movement disorders.
- Have difficulties or delays in their development.
- Have bleeding disorders or bruise easily are victims of child abuse.

Children with these conditions may have more serious problems after a mild head injury.

What should I do if my child has a head injury, but does not lose consciousness?

For anything more than a light bump on the head, you should call your pediatrician. Your pediatrician will want to know when and how the injury happened and how your child is feeling.

If your child is alert and responds to you, the head injury is mild and usually no tests or x-rays are needed. Your child may cry from pain or fright, but this should last no longer than 10 minutes. You may need to apply a cold compress for 20 minutes to help the swelling go down. And then watch your child for a period of time.

If there are any **CHANGES** in your child's condition, call your pediatrician or right away. You may need to bring your child to the pediatrician's office or directly to the hospital.

THE FOLLOWING ARE SIGNS OF A MORE SERIOUS INJURY:

- A constant headache that gets worse
- Slurred speech or confusion
- Dizziness that does not go away or happens repeatedly
- Extreme irritability or other abnormal behavior
- Vomiting, more than two times
- Stumbling or difficulty walking
- Oozing watery fluid from the nose or ears
- Difficulty waking up
- Unusual paleness that lasts more than an hour
- Convulsions (seizures)

- Difficulty recognizing familiar people

What if my child loses consciousness?

If your child loses consciousness, call your pediatrician. Watch your child closely for a period of time. Your pediatrician will let you know if this can be done at home or in the hospital. If you take your child home and her condition changes, call your pediatrician right away, since more care may be needed.

What kinds of tests may be needed? Where are they done?

A CAT scan is a special type of x-ray that gives a view of the brain and the skull. It is painless. A CAT scan is available at almost every hospital.

What is the difference between a head x-ray and a CAT scan?

- Head x-rays can show fractures (bone breaks) of the skull, but do not show if there is any brain injury.
- Cat scans can show brain injury and may be helpful in deciding the seriousness of the injury. They can even show very minor injuries that may not need treatment.

What should I do if my child needs to be observed at home?

You or another responsible adult should stay with your child for the first 24 hours and be ready to take your child back to the pediatrician or the hospital if there's a problem. Your child may need to be watched carefully for a few days, because there could be a delay in signs of a more serious injury.

It is okay for your child to go to sleep. However, your pediatrician may recommend that you check your child every two to three hours to make sure he moves normally, wakes enough to recognize you, and responds to you.

Do not give pain medication, except for acetaminophen, unless your pediatrician says it's OK. Your pediatrician will let you know, if your child can eat or drink as usual.