

Head Injury Instructions

This leaflet is intended for people who have been assessed by a doctor or nurse following a head injury, (and their carers), but who have been allowed home. Always see a doctor or nurse if you are concerned about an injury.

Minor head injuries

Minor head injury and knocks to the head are common, particularly in children. Following the injury, if the person is conscious (awake), and there is no deep cut or severe head damage, it is unusual for there to be any damage to the brain.

However, sometimes a knock to the head can cause damage to a blood vessel which may bleed next to the brain. This is uncommon, but can be serious. Symptoms may not develop for some hours, or even days, after a knock to the head. In rare cases, symptoms can develop even weeks after a head injury.

This is why 'head injury instructions' are given to people who have had a head injury. These are symptoms to look out for following a knock to the head.

Head injury instructions

See a doctor quickly if any of the following occur after a head injury.

- Increasing drowsiness (but see below).
- Worsening headache (but see below).
- Confusion or strange behaviour.
- Two or more bouts of vomiting.
- Loss of use of part of the body. For example, weakness in an arm or leg.
- Dizziness, loss of balance or convulsions.
- Any visual problems such as blurring of vision or double vision.
- Blood, or clear fluid, leaking from the nose or ear.
- Unusual breathing patterns.

Drowsiness

After a knock to the head, children will often cry, be distressed and then settle down. It is then quite common for them to want to sleep for a short while. This is normal. However, it will appear to be a normal 'peaceful' sleep, and they wake up after a nap.

Some parents are afraid to let their children go to sleep if the accident happens just before bedtime. Do let them. Drowsiness means they cannot be roused. If you have a concern, wake the child up after an hour or so. They may be grumpy about being woken up, but that is reassuring. You can then let him or her go back off to sleep again. You can do this a few times during the night if there is particular concern. When asleep, check to see that he or she appears to be breathing normally and is sleeping in a normal position.

Headache

It is normal after a knock to the head to have a mild headache. Sometimes there is also tenderness over bruising or mild swelling of the scalp. Some paracetamol or ibuprofen will help. It is a headache that becomes worse and worse which is of more concern.

Comprehensive patient resources are available at www.patient.co.uk

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