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PROFESSOR JOHN MURTAGH

THIS monthly series of patient handouts covers common conditions seen in general practice.

GPs can cut out and keep the handouts to photocopy for their patients or access the leaflets on *Australian Doctor's* web site at www.australiandoctor.com.au

The handouts will be posted on the web site after publication, gradually building up to an extensive library of patient resources.

Professor Murtagh is adjunct professor in the department of general practice at Monash University, and professorial fellow in general practice at the University of Melbourne.

Patient Handouts

Concussion

What is concussion?

Concussion of the brain is a temporary disturbance of function of the central nervous system due to a blow to the head. The effect can vary from mild giddiness or headache to loss of consciousness.

Does the concussed person always lose consciousness?

No, there may or may not be a brief loss of consciousness. The traditional definition of concussion was unconsciousness due to head injury with gradual return to the conscious state. This is no longer the case because concussion can also mean abnormal function of the brain such as being stunned or dazed without loss of consciousness.

What is the cause?

Concussion results from a blow to the head.

The brain is a soft organ with a consistency like jelly (often compared to a jellyfish). Shock waves of concussion cause it to be shaken about in its protective skull. The effect can cause injury just below the point of impact or on the opposite side of the brain where it is jolted up against the skull.

What are the symptoms?

These vary according to the severity of the injury but can include:

- Being stunned or dazed (eg, "seeing stars").
- Senselessness (eg, "foggy brain").
- Headache (may be the only symptom).
- Amnesia (loss of memory).
- Dizziness.
- Blurred or double vision.
- Vomiting.
- Clamminess/sweating.
- Irritability.
- Unsteady walking.
- Difficulty speaking.
- Mental lapses.
- Loss of consciousness.

What are the three steps (or grades) of concussion?

Mild (grade 1)

- Stunned or dazed.
- Senses clear in less than 60 seconds.
- No post-traumatic amnesia.
- ± Loss of consciousness.

Moderate (grade 2)

- Stunned or dazed.
- Senses cloudy for longer than 60 seconds.
- Headache.
- Amnesia longer than 60 minutes.
- ± Loss of consciousness.

Severe (grade 3)

- As for grade 2 plus:
- Irritability.
- Persistent headaches.
- Unsteady walking.

What is the outcome?

The outcome is usually excellent, with recovery within an hour or so, although in some cases it may take as long as a few days to return to normal. There are usually no persistent abnormalities. However, a slow bleed into or around the brain can occur after head injury, so if further problems develop, such as unexpected drowsiness or change in the conscious state, immediate investigation at the nearest hospital is necessary.

Remember, there is no such thing as delayed concussion.

What is post-concussion syndrome?

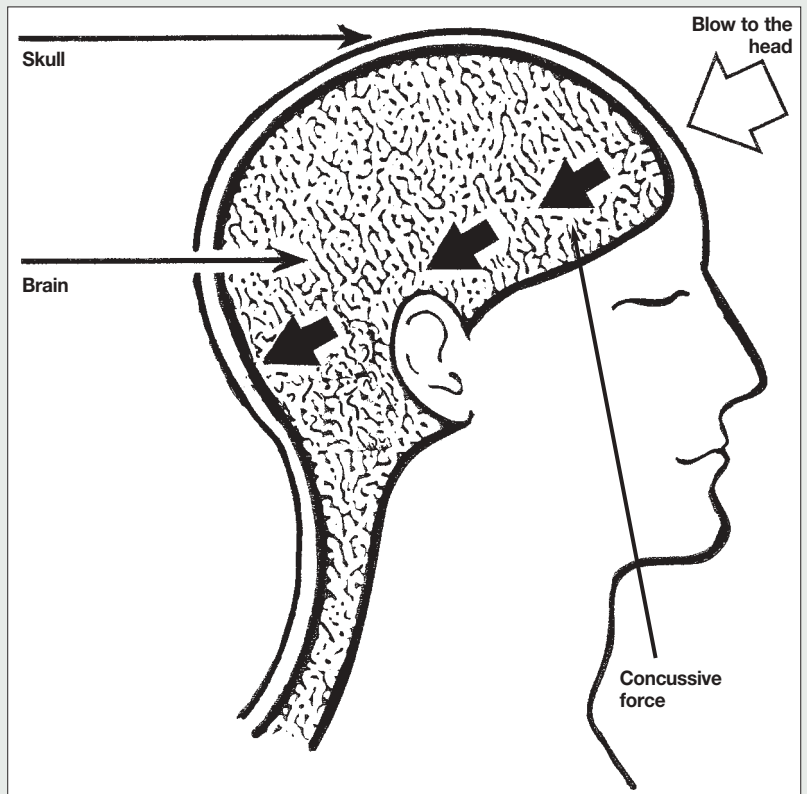
Occasionally a person with concussion develops persistent

headache and dizziness for several weeks. Poor memory and concentration, and sluggish decision-making may indicate impaired functioning of the brain. These people require further help and investigation.

What is the treatment of concussion?

The patient should:

- Lie down quietly with the head and shoulders slightly elevated.
- Have cold compresses (eg, an ice pack applied to the brow).
- Avoid eating and drinking for the first four hours.
- Avoid alcohol, sedatives or stimulants.
- Take paracetamol for headache.
- Avoid taking aspirin.



AUTHOR: PROFESSOR JOHN MURTAGH

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