



Mild Head Injury in Older Adults

Cork Emergency Medicine



Important Points:

You had a mild head injury which can sometimes be called a concussion. Most people recover rapidly following a mild head injury. However some people may suffer from symptoms over a longer period. There is a small risk of you developing serious complications so for the first 24-48 hours on discharge home following your head injury you should be watched closely by a responsible adult.

First 24-48 Hours After a Mild Head Injury

Supervision: Do not stay alone for the first 48 hours after concussion

Rest/Sleeping: Take rest (physical and mental) and avoid strenuous activity for at least 24 hours. Ask someone to check on you every four hours to make sure that you are alright. It is important to reduce screen time (mobile phone, computer etc) to as little as possible during this time.

Driving: Do not drive for at least 24 hours. You should not drive until your symptoms have resolved.

Drinking/Drugs: Do not drink alcohol or take sleeping pills or recreational drugs in the next 48 hours. All of these can make you feel worse. They also make it hard for other people to tell whether the injury is affecting you or not.

Pain Relief: Use basic paracetamol and avoid drugs containing codeine as these can precipitate rebound headaches.

Warning Signs:

- ❖ Loss of consciousness
- ❖ Drowsiness/inability to be woken
- ❖ Increasing disorientation/confusion such as cannot remember new events, recognise people or places
- ❖ New deafness in one or both ears
- ❖ Problems understanding or speaking
- ❖ Loss of balance or problems walking
- ❖ Increasingly restless, agitated or combative
- ❖ Blurred or double vision
- ❖ Change in behaviour (acting strange/saying things that don't make sense)
- ❖ Any weakness/numbness in your arms or legs or increased clumsiness
- ❖ Repeated vomiting
- ❖ Bleeding/clear fluid coming out of your ears or nose
- ❖ Severe headache not relieved by painkillers
- ❖ Pass out or have a blackout or a seizure

Medications:

If you are taking a blood thinner, it is especially important to let the medical team in the emergency department know when they are examining you. You can have more bleeding if you are taking this type of medication and have hit your head. It is important to clarify with them when you can re-start taking this medication before you leave the emergency department.

If you are concerned, please contact the Emergency Department you first attended:

Cork University Hospital
(021) 4920200

Mercy University Hospital
(021) 230 5011

M-UCC at
St Mary's Health Campus
(021) 4926900

Local Injury Unit,
Mallow General Hospital
(022) 58506

Bantry General Hospital
(027) 52900



Post Concussion Symptoms:

Concussion healing times vary, but it is common for symptoms to last longer for older adults compared to other age groups. You may have some common effects from the head injury which usually resolve in several weeks to three months. Return to your normal activities gradually. Tiredness may exacerbate some post-concussion symptoms. Some post concussive symptoms that you experience may include:

Mild Headaches: Headaches are a common problem after a concussion. They can be made worse by fatigue and stress. Sleeping, resting or taking a break from activities requiring concentration or effort will usually relieve headaches.

Decreased Attention and Concentration: Many people have trouble concentrating for a while after they have had a concussion. Complete activities that require concentration for a short time, and then come back to it when you have had a break.

Poor Memory: Memory can be affected after concussion. Don't worry if you can't think of a name or a phone number. Use your phone/a diary to remind you of appointments etc.

Feeling Vague, Slowed or 'Foggy' Thinking: Some people who have sustained a concussion find their thinking is a bit slower. Encourage others to slow down by asking questions and having them repeat what they have said. Allow yourself extra time to complete tasks and avoid situations where you are under pressure to do things quickly.

Nausea/Dizziness: Occasionally, people find that they get a sick or uncomfortable feeling if they move or change their position quickly. It is best to avoid such sudden movements or changes in position until it clears.

Balance Problems: You may find that you are a bit more clumsy than usual. Don't worry if you do find that you are a bit unsteady on your feet, or bump into furniture, or maybe drop things. Just take everything you do a little more slowly.

Fatigue: Your brain needs time to recover. It is important to get adequate amounts of sleep as you may feel more physically and mentally tired than normal. Rest during the day if required but do not spend the entire day in bed. Ensure a balance of rest and gentle activity.

Irritability/Mood Swings: During recovery it is normal to feel frustrated or sad when you do not feel well or cannot be as active as usual. Discuss these feelings with your family/friends. Relaxation techniques (controlled breathing/progressive muscle relaxation) can be of benefit. Irritability will be worse when you are tired, so rest will help.

Increased Sensitivity to Light/Sounds: You may find that your eyes are sensitive to bright light. Wearing dark glasses in strong light can help to manage this. Seek out a quiet environment if possible as you can be more sensitive to noise.

Recovery:

You should start to feel better within a few days and be 'back to normal' within three months. Following discharge home, return to the emergency department if you experience any of the red flag symptoms listed above. Otherwise see your GP for any concerns you may have.

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