

Head, Neck, & Back Injuries

EXPERT ADVICE

Recognizing a Concussion

“Concussions are a hot topic today, especially with high school and college football. I think it’s important to know that they can happen to kids in any sport—whether it’s skateboarding, soccer or lacrosse. It’s also important to learn how to recognize it. Symptoms include confusion, loss of consciousness, progressive headaches, blurred vision, and vomiting. Nowadays, if there is any question, the child needs to remain out of the game until he is back to normal. Even a second, more minor injury can have disastrous consequences for the brain.”



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Sports injuries that involve head, neck, and back trauma are often some of the most serious injuries of all—depending on their severity, they can pose the risk of paralysis or even death. If you are involved in contact sports (football, in particular) take measures to wear the necessary protective equipment to avoid being injured.



By Laura Childers

A **concussion** is an injury to the brain that forces it to move within the skull. Concussion symptoms are not always obvious: they include everything from increased confusion, headaches, and irritability to double vision and vomiting. If a concussion is suspected, an athlete should receive immediate medical attention.

Whiplash is a neck strain that occurs following a sudden acceleration-deceleration force, where your neck muscles and ligaments are forced into hyperextension. Pain and stiffness can usually be treated with P.R.I.C.E.

“**Burners**” or “**stingers**,” named for the warm electrical sensation they create down the neck, shoulder, and along the arm, are temporary injuries to the bundle of nerves that runs from the back of the neck into the arm. Common in contact sports, burners and stingers usually last only a few minutes. See a doctor if pain persists, is severe, or is felt in both arms.

A **herniated disc**, or slipped disc, is a disc that has bulged or ruptured from its

proper place. It occurs most often in the lumbar spine (lower back) and can press on nearby nerves, causing severe pain. A slipped disc is often the result of repeated overuse that leads to the degeneration of the outer layer of the disc.

Spondylolysis is a stress fracture of the vertebra. It is a fairly common overuse injury in sports, and most often occurs in the lower lumbar area. If the fracture weakens the bone so much that it is unable to maintain its position, the vertebra can start to shift and surgery may be required to correct the condition.

Neck fractures and cervical SCIs (spinal cord injuries) are considered medical emergencies. If someone suffers a break in one or more of the cervical bones in the neck, do not attempt to move them from where they are without trained medical care. Immediate attention from a neurosurgeon is crucial. Well more than half of all catastrophic injuries in sports are cervical spine injuries. 🧠

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