

Head, Neck, and Spine Injuries

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Head Trauma

What is it?

Any damage to the scalp, skull, or brain caused by injury.

Plan of Action:

To give first aid to a person who has head trauma, **call 911 or your local emergency number.**

While waiting for emergency medical help to arrive:

- **Keep the person still.** The injured person should lie down with the head and shoulders slightly elevated. Don't move the person unless necessary. Avoid moving the person's neck. If the person is wearing a helmet, don't remove it.
- **Stop any bleeding.** Apply firm pressure to the wound with sterile gauze or a clean cloth. But don't apply direct pressure to the wound if you suspect a skull fracture.
- **Watch for changes in breathing and alertness.** If the person shows no signs of circulation — no breathing, coughing or movement — begin CPR.

Head trauma that results in concussion symptoms need to be evaluated by a medical professional. Concussion symptoms include nausea, unsteadiness, headaches or difficulty concentrating.

Any of the following symptoms may indicate a serious head injury:

- Severe head or facial bleeding
- Bleeding or fluid leakage from the nose or ears
- Vomiting
- Severe headache
- Change in consciousness for more than a few seconds
- Black-and-blue discoloration below the eyes or behind the ears
- Not breathing
- Confusion
- Agitation
- Loss of balance
- Weakness or an inability to use an arm or leg
- Unequal pupil size
- Slurred speech
- Seizures

Headache

What is it?

A painful sensation in any part of the head, ranging from sharp to dull, that may occur with other symptoms.

Most headaches are minor, and you can treat them with a pain reliever. Some headaches, however, signal a dangerous or serious medical problem. Don't ignore headaches that aren't explained or headaches that steadily worsen.

Symptoms:

Get immediate medical attention if your headache:

- Develops suddenly and severely.
- Persists for several days.
- Causes mental confusion or loss of consciousness.
- Happens with seizures.

Immediate medical attention also is needed if your headache occurs with new:

- Dizziness or loss of balance.
- Weakness or paralysis, such as in the arms or legs.

- Numbness.
- Difficulty speaking or understanding speech.
- Reddened eye.

Also seek medical attention if your headache:

- Occurs with a fever, stiff neck or rash.
- Is accompanied by changes in vision, such as blurring or seeing halos around lights.
- Is serious and follows a recent sore throat or respiratory infection.
- Begins or worsens after a head injury, fall, or bump.
- Is triggered by changing the position of your head, coughing, sneezing, bending or physical activity.
- Is a different type of headache from your usual type and you're older than 50.

Spinal Injury

What is it?

An injury to the spine.

Signs/Symptoms:

Assume a person has a spinal injury if:

- There's evidence of a head injury with an ongoing change in the person's level of consciousness
- The person complains of severe pain in his or her neck or back
- An injury has exerted substantial force on the back or head
- The person complains of weakness, numbness, or paralysis or lacks control of his or her limbs, bladder or bowels
- The neck or body is twisted or positioned oddly

Plan of Action:

- **Get help.** Call 911 or emergency medical help.
- **Keep the person still.** Place heavy towels or rolled sheets on both sides of the neck or hold the head and neck to prevent movement.

- **Avoid moving the head or neck.** Provide as much first aid as possible without moving the person's head or neck. If the person shows no signs of circulation (breathing, coughing or movement), begin CPR, but do not tilt the head back to open the airway. Use your fingers to gently grasp the jaw and lift it forward. If the person has no pulse, begin chest compressions.
- **Keep helmet on.** If the person is wearing a helmet, don't remove it. A football helmet facemask should be removed if you need to access the airway.
- **Don't roll alone.** If you must roll the person because he or she is vomiting, choking on blood, or because you have to make sure the person is still breathing, you need at least one other person. With one of you at the head and another along the side of the injured person, work together to keep the person's head, neck and back aligned while rolling the person onto one side.

Concussions

What is it?

A type of head injury that occurs when the head or body is hit so hard that the brain moves inside the skull.

Signs/Symptoms:

- Feeling stunned or dazed
- Confusion
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Dizziness, unsteadiness, or difficulty balancing
- Double vision or flashing lights
- Loss of memory of events that happened before or after the injury
- Sleepiness

Plan of Action:

- Seek medical attention for evaluation and monitoring to determine severity

- If there is a change in consciousness, worsening signs or symptoms, or other cause for concerns seek medical attention ASAP.
- If the person becomes unresponsive, call 911