

Concussions

Concussions are a major topic in the sporting world right now. Almost all sports have had problems with concussions at some level, but one sport more so than others. Concussions are very serious and dangerous, as you will read later in this paper. There are also many ways to help prevent concussions and the problems they cause.

A concussion is an injury to the brain or spinal cord due to jarring from a blow or fall. (1) A concussion is sometimes caused by the whiplash effect after a hit to a solid surface. The head often will snapback too quickly and cause the brain to move around in the head, even if the head made no contact at all. Another way concussions can be caused is by simply taking a blow to the head. The brain can easily be injured by the force of the blow.

There are early warning signs that a person may have a concussion, and there are also signs of the severity of the concussion. Concussions have different grades that let a person know the severity of their concussion. The grades of concussions are on a scale from 1 to 3. There are recognizable symptoms for each one.

Grade one concussions are the most common concussions, although sometimes they are difficult to recognize. This grade of concussion does not render somebody unconscious, and only causes momentary confusion, making it difficult to diagnose. Grade one concussions also cause poor concentration and the inability to process information. The symptoms of grade one concussions go away within fifteen minutes of the concussion. However, if a player suffers another concussion within that time span, the effects could be much worse than the initial concussion. Grade one concussions cause minor lingering headaches for a short span of time.

These types of concussions are commonly dismissed by coaches as “Having his bell rung” or “Getting dinged.”⁽¹⁾

Grade two concussions have very many similarities to grade one concussions. Some of these similarities are that the player does not lose consciousness. The player also has poor concentration and loses the ability to process information. Headaches occur after the concussion, although they are a bit more mild than a grade one concussion. However, there is one very big difference between a grade one and grade two concussion. While a grade one concussion only has symptoms that last up to fifteen minutes, grade two concussions have symptoms that last longer than fifteen minutes. They also occasionally cause loss of memory from events immediately preceding the concussion. If the symptoms of this concussion last longer than 1 hour, the person or player should seek medical help immediately.⁽¹⁾

Grade 3 concussions are the most deadly of the concussions. These concussions cause loss of consciousness as well as the same effects of the other two concussions. Due to the loss of consciousness, grade 3 concussions are the most easily recognizable.⁽¹⁾ However, they are also the most deadly. Grade 3 concussions have symptoms that can last for weeks. In serious cases, they can signal mild brain damage and even brief comas.⁽²⁾ They also cause severe headaches and migraines that can last for weeks and sometimes even months. As you can see, concussions have a wide range of variety and can sometimes be very lethal.

Sports are a huge cause of concussions in the U.S. Each year, between 1.4 and 3.6 million sports related concussions occur. This is such a widespread estimate because many concussions go unnoticed. Also, many of these occur at the high school level. Approximately, 10 to 20% of all athletes in a contact sport suffer concussions each year.⁽³⁾ Football accounts for the

most concussions in teenagers. Football players often are left defenseless and susceptible to a vicious hit to the head from an oncoming player. Among college football players, 34% have had one concussion, and 20% have had multiple concussions.⁽⁴⁾ Overall, concussions are a very big problem for football players.

Athletes must pass a series of tests after sustaining a concussion before they are allowed to resume competition. Team physicians and concussion specialists check in a variety of ways to make sure the player is not woozy, dizzy, or nauseous. They ask simple questions such as how many fingers they are holding up, where they are, or the names of certain people. If the player passes those tests, then they put them through harder and more truthful tests. The best treatment for a concussion is to rest until you don't feel the effects for at least 48 hours. Allowing the player to come back too early could be disastrous, as you will soon read.

There are a few long term effects of concussions to players. These effects are called post-concussion syndrome, which is when the symptoms of a concussion (such as headaches or dizziness) last for an extended period of time. This extended period of time can be anywhere from a month to a week, or even a year.⁽⁵⁾ Sometimes, post-concussion syndrome can cause huge problems later in life with long-term side-effects. Two of these long term side effects are migraines and Alzheimer's disease. Concussions almost always form some sort of headaches. If they never go away, they will steadily get worse until they turn into migraines later on in life. Alzheimer's disease is a disease that usually occurs to older people and causes the loss of both short term memory and long term memory. Often times, sufferers of the disease even forget their own family members. Alzheimer's is a deadly disease that can render a person virtually useless. The likelihood of post-concussion syndrome is increased dramatically when a person suffers multiple concussions, and it is even higher when a person suffers the second concussion while

they are still trying to get over the effects of the first concussion. Concussions can cause dangerous side effects for a person as they get later on in life.

The American Academy of Neurology is an international association of neurology professionals that work very hard to explain neurologic problems to parents, and show them possible treatments. The guidelines they set for sports related concussions state that the team should remove any athlete suspected of having sustained a concussion from a game until they have been seen by a medical specialist. They also recommend that the team bring a certified athletic trainer to all games and practices. ⁽⁶⁾

Concussions in sports have been a hot topic in the past few months. The number of sports concussions seem to have been increasing in the past few years. This is due to a number of reasons. First, physicians and specialists have much more knowledge of concussions than they used to. Injuries that would not have been classified as concussions a few years ago are now. Also, athletes now are much stronger and bigger than they were in the past. They have the ability to cause injuries to others that weaker athletes would not be able to. A lot of the injuries they cause now are not even from illegal hits or easily viewed as dangerous hits, though some of their hits are illegal. Finally, a bit of a lesser known cause of concussions is due to the media. Athletes know that if they put a huge hit on somebody or do something spectacular, they might be put on the highlight reel and stand out more to people. Therefore, the athletes tend to play with a bit more recklessness and abandon, trying to become more well known and feared around the league.

While many major sports have had trouble with concussions, there is a specific organization that has tried to take a stand in preventing concussions. I am talking, of course,

about the NFL. The NFL has always been a league that has a ton of injuries, but now it seems that the severity of the injury is getting worse. This past year seemed to be the year of the concussion for football. Not only were more players getting concussions, but many of them knocked the player unconscious. The commissioner of the NFL, Roger Goodell, has taken a stand in trying to prevent these horrible concussions. Any helmet to helmet hit to the head on a defenseless receiver is a 15 yard penalty. Any helmet to helmet hit on a quarterback is a 15 yard penalty. If a defender launches himself into the air at a player, with the intent of hitting that player in the head, not only is it a penalty, but it also warrants a fine from the commissioners office. The amount of money that they fine is dependent on how big and bad of a hit to the head it was, and on if the defender intended to cause harm to the other player. The commissioner is also considering creating a penalty on offensive players, such as running back, to protect themselves. For example, if a running back tries to bull over a defender while the running back is leading with his head, it would be a penalty on the offensive player if this rule was enforced. The idea is to help players safety as much as possible.

If a player does sustain a concussion, there are rules to protect that player until the concussion is gone. The player may not return to competition until he is completely asymptomatic, and has normal neurological test results. If a player loses consciousness, he cannot return to the same game or practice.⁽⁷⁾ These sort of player safety rules were not in place as early as two years ago. As you can see, the NFL is trying to take a stand in players safety regarding concussions.

Sports have had their problems with concussions this past year, particularly the NFL. They are also working very hard to learn more about concussions and how to prevent them. If

they don't take this stand, concussions could become even more likely, and they are too deadly and dangerous for that.

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