

# HEAD INJURY

---



## ■ ■ ■ Description

Injury to the head can occur with or without unconsciousness (“knocked out”) or other visible signs. Head wounds may be open (the skin is broken) or closed (the skin is intact), depending on the nature of the injury.

## ■ ■ ■ Common Signs and Symptoms

Symptoms depend on the extent of injury. The presence or absence of swelling at the injury site is not related to the seriousness of the injury.

- ?? Headache, drowsiness, confusion, amnesia or memory lapses, irritability, unusual behavior, vomiting and nausea, and blurred vision
- ?? Pupils of different size
- ?? Loss of consciousness, either temporary or for long periods
- ?? Bleeding of the scalp if the skin is broken

## ■ ■ ■ Causes

The most severe head injuries are usually the result of a large impact of high energy (such as in motor vehicle accidents), with or without the use of helmets. More severe head injuries are incurred when helmets are not worn.

## ■ ■ ■ Risk Increases With

- ?? Contact sports, especially football or boxing, or riding bicycles, motorcycles, or horses without a helmet
- ?? Seizure disorders
- ?? Excess alcohol consumption

## ■ ■ ■ Preventive Measures

- ?? Wear proper protective headgear and ensure correct fit.
- ?? Do not drink alcohol or use mind-altering drugs and drive.

## ■ ■ ■ Expected Outcome

Head injuries are usually curable with early recognition of danger signs and medical treatment. Complications can be life threatening or cause permanent disability.

## ■ ■ ■ Possible Complications

- ?? Bleeding under the skull (subdural hemorrhage or hematoma, epidural hematoma, concussion)
- ?? Bleeding into the brain

## ■ ■ ■ General Treatment Considerations

Initial treatment involves immediate evaluation, often requiring hospitalization for observation, and other treatment as needed. If you are to be watched at home, have someone awaken you every 2 hours for 24 hours or as recommended.

This person should report to the physician immediately if he or she cannot awaken or arouse you. Also report any of the following: vomiting, inability to move arms and legs equally well on both sides, temperature above 100°F (37.8°C), neck stiffness, pupils of unequal size or shape or reactivity, convulsions, noticeable restlessness, severe headache that persists for longer than 4 hours after injury, confusion, disorientation, or mental status changes.

## ■ ■ ■ Medication

Do not take any medicine, including over-the-counter acetaminophen or aspirin, until the diagnosis is certain, because these may mask developing symptoms.

## ■ ■ ■ Notify a Physician If

- ?? Symptoms get worse or do not improve in 24 hours.
- ?? Any of the following symptoms occur:
  - Vomiting
  - Inability to move arms and legs equally well on both sides
  - Temperature above 100°F (37.8°C)
  - Stiff neck
  - Pupils of unequal size, shape, or reactivity
  - Convulsions
  - Noticeable restlessness
  - Severe headache that persists for longer than 4 hours after injury
  - Confusion or disorientation or mental status changes

