

# 5 Common Myths About Concussions

Each year, one million Americans are treated in hospital emergency departments for traumatic brain injury (TBI). Most of these injuries are concussions.

A "concussion" is just another term for a mild traumatic brain injury. Just like any injury or illness, every concussion must be evaluated, managed and treated appropriately by a doctor. Symptoms following a concussion can last for minutes, days, weeks, months, or even longer.

Myth 1. "Billy will be fine.  
He just got his "bell rung"

The coach called it a "zinger," a "ding," a "bell ringer," or a "good clean shot," but any temporary loss of brain functioning due to a blow to the head is a brain "concussion." Concussions can lead to long-lasting, physical, emotional and cognitive problems.

Recently enacted laws in Washington State, and 7 other states, now require an athlete under the age of 18 be removed from practice and/or a game after sustaining a concussion. They are not allowed to return until they have obtained a written return-to-play authorization from a medical professional. A version of this law is currently being con-

sidered by the D.C. City Council. The NFL and Brain Injury Association have strongly advocated its passage in all states.

## Myth 2. “I Didn’t Black-Out, So I Don’t Have a Concussion”

Contrary to popular myth, you do not have to lose consciousness to have a concussion. In fact, 90% of patients who suffer concussions never lose consciousness. Recent medical research shows that amnesia (a loss of memory at the time of the injury), and not loss of consciousness, is the main indicator of concussion.

Other symptoms secondary to concussion can include headache, confusion, dizziness, blurry vision, fatigue, mood and personality changes, memory or concentration issues, vomiting, seizures, slurred speech, weakness or numbness of the extremities, agitation or irritability, and impulse control issues.

You should always seek medical help promptly if suffering from any of these symptoms following a head injury.

## Myth 3. “It’s Only a Concussion. I’ll Be Fine”

Unfortunately, many people don't understand that even a mild concussion can change the way your brain normally sends and receives information.

The human brain contains approximately 100 billion brain cells called neurons, which connect to each other through mechanical and chemical pathways. When these pathways are interrupted following a brain injury, the brain's ability to process information is degraded.

Imagine you are driving on a highway and the road is suddenly blocked. Sure, you can re-route your trip to a different road, but your new route is slower, and your trip will

take longer. The brain works the same way. It can compensate for damage to brain cells and disruptions of neural pathways following a concussion, but the re-routing of information will cause your brain to slow down and cognitive functioning will be reduced.

Even a mild concussion can permanently affect your life, making work or school difficult, damaging your personal relationships, and perhaps requiring long-term care and treatment.

### Myth 4. "The MRI or CT Scan was Normal, so Everything's Fine"

CT scans and MRI's are wonderful diagnostic tools, but they cannot detect a concussion. In fact, if anything abnormal does show up on a CT or MRI, by definition you don't have a concussion. You have something much more serious, such as a subdural hematoma or a focal brain lesion.

CT scans and MRI's can only see large anatomy, approximately a millimeter in size, so any damage smaller than a millimeter won't show up.

But when we talk about brain cells, we are speaking about microns -- a millionth of a meter. One day, perhaps soon, scientists will develop imaging technologies that will allow us to see the microscopic damage caused to brain cells following a concussion. Until that time, remember, a normal MRI or CT Scan does not mean you don't have a serious brain injury.

### Myth 5. "I Don't Need to See My Doctor. I'm Fine"

Every concussion should be evaluated, managed, and treated appropriately by a doctor. A concussion should never be taken lightly or ignored.

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