



Head Injury

DESCRIPTION

Injury to the head can occur with or without unconsciousness—that is, without being knocked out—and without other visible signs. Head wounds may be open, when the skin is broken, or they may be closed with the skin 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. Other signs and symptoms include the following:

- Headache, drowsiness, confusion, amnesia or memory lapses, irritability, unusual behavior, vomiting and nausea, and blurred vision
- Pupils are a different size
- Loss of consciousness, either temporarily 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 high-energy impact, such as a motor vehicle accident, with or without the use of helmets. More severe head injuries are incurred when helmets are not worn.

FACTORS THAT INCREASE RISK

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

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Wear proper protective headgear and ensure a correct fit.
- Do not drink alcohol or use mind-altering drugs when operating a motor vehicle.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Head injuries are usually curable with early recognition of danger signs and appropriate medical treatment. Complications can be life threatening and may 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 signs such as vomiting, inability to move arms and legs equally well on both sides, a 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.

WHEN TO CALL YOUR DOCTOR

- 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

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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

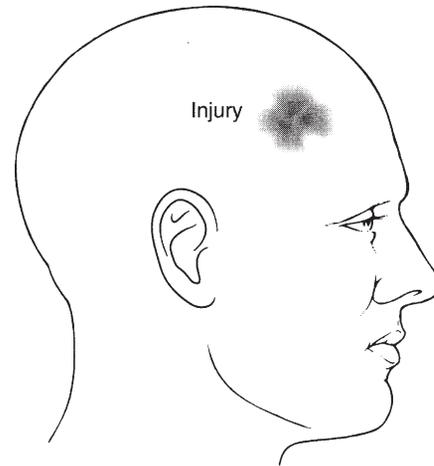


FIGURE 1