

# Head & Neck Injuries

## EXPERT ADVICE

### Concussions

“We know more about concussions today than we’ve known before, largely because of several studies undertaken by the NFL to assess their long-term consequences. I think probably the No. 1 myth about concussions is that they always involve a loss of consciousness. In many cases, the concussion is mild and leads only to disorientation, lightheadedness, headache, and difficulties with attention span and short-term memory. It’s important to understand that there is no test you can do to determine whether someone has had a concussion – it’s a clinical diagnosis that can only be made by a neurologist, neurosurgeon, or sports injury physician. Getting a diagnosis is vital, because if you have another concussion on top of one that hasn’t healed, the consequences can be significantly exaggerated.”



**Timothy Strait, M.D.,**  
Neurosurgeon,  
Chattanooga  
Neurosurgery  
and Spine



Injuries to the head and neck can be some of the most dangerous of all, but a great deal can be prevented by wearing the proper gear. If your sport requires you to wear head protection, be vigilant about using it!

**Concussions** Caused by a blow to the head, a concussion is the most common form of head injury for athletes. It can be easy to miss as its symptoms can be very subtle, such as headache, fatigue, irritability, disorientation, visual disturbance, and confusion. If a concussion is suspected, it’s important to remove an athlete from play immediately for an evaluation. A concussion that goes untreated can put an athlete at serious risk, because repeat injury can lead to a permanent decrease in brain function. *Other symptoms: memory problems, drowsiness, nausea or vomiting, problems with concentration*

**Neck Sprains and Strains** One of the most common sport-related neck injuries is whiplash, which occurs when the neck is quickly thrown forward causing ligaments to strain and muscles to spasm. Whiplash can be painful, but with rest and treatment will usually go away within one

to two weeks. *Symptoms: pain, decreased range of motion, tightness, tenderness, headaches*

**Burners and Stingers** Burners and stingers, named for the tingling sensation they cause in the back and neck, are common in contact sports like football, soccer, hockey, rugby, wrestling, and lacrosse. They occur when the neck is thrown into a side position, causing the nerves in the neck to be pinched. Symptoms usually resolve within minutes or hours, but if they persist, it’s important to see a doctor. *Symptoms: a burning or electric shock sensation, arm numbness or weakness, warm sensations*

**Broken Neck** A fracture to any bone in the neck is always a very serious matter, because it can result in possible damage to the spinal cord and possibly lead to paralysis. If you suspect someone has suffered a neck fracture, **do not attempt to lift or move that person and call 9-1-1 immediately.** *Symptoms: shock, temporary or permanent paralysis, pain spreading from the neck to the shoulder or arms, bruising or swelling at the back of the neck* +

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