

Head Injury

Brief Version

What is a head injury?

Most head injuries hurt only the scalp, not the brain. Your child might have a big lump even if it was a minor injury because there is a large blood supply to the scalp. For the same reason small cuts on the head may bleed a lot. Only 1% to 2% of injured children have a skull fracture. Your child has not had a concussion unless he passes out, acts very confused, or cannot remember what happened.

How can I take care of my child?

- **Wound care.** Call the doctor right away if the skin is split open and might need stitches. Wash any minor scrapes with soap and water. Apply pressure with a clean cloth (sterile gauze if you have it) for 10 minutes to stop any bleeding. For swelling, apply ice for 20 minutes.
- **Rest.** Encourage your child to lie down and rest until all symptoms are gone (or for at least 2 hours). It is okay for your child to sleep. You don't have to try to keep him awake. Just have him sleep nearby so you can check on him from time to time. Don't give any pain medicine. If the headache is bad enough to need medicine, your child should be checked by your doctor.
- **Diet.** Give only clear fluids (ones you can see through) until your child has gone 2 hours without vomiting.
- **Special precautions.** Wake up your child twice during the night, once at your bedtime and once 4 hours later. Wake him up and get him to walk and talk. Do this for 2 nights. After that, go back to a normal routine.

Call your child's doctor right away if:

- The skin is split open and might need stitches.
- The headache becomes severe.
- Vomiting occurs three or more times.
- Your child's vision becomes blurred or double.
- Your child becomes difficult to awaken or confused.
- Walking or talking becomes difficult.
- Your child's symptoms get worse in any other way.

Written by B.D. Schmitt, M.D., author of "Your Child's Health," Bantam Books.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.