

# RECOGNIZING CONCUSSION

## In People Who Communicate Without Words



A tool for those who care for people

who communicate without words including family members, healthcare professionals, service providers and more.



Concussions are caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head or body. Even a “ding,” “getting your bell rung,” or what seems to be a mild bump or blow to the head can be serious.

You can't see a concussion. Signs and symptoms of concussion can show up right after the injury or may not appear or be noticed until days or weeks after the injury.

(Adapted from the CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/headsup/index.html>)

### Common Problems at the Time of Injury

#### Headaches

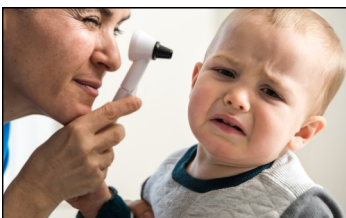
- headache that keeps coming back
- pain in head/ neck
- pain below the ear
- pain in the jaw
- pain in or around the eyes

#### Balance Problems

- dizziness
- trouble with balance

#### Sensory Changes

- changes in taste or smell
- appetite changes
- too hot/ cold
- ringing in the ears
- bothered by noises
- can't handle background noise
- vision changes
- bothered by light



If you have any of these problems, see a doctor right away!

- nausea or vomiting
- one pupil larger than the other
- headache that does not go away
- seizures, eyes fluttering, body going stiff, staring into space
- loss of consciousness, even brief
- disoriented/ confused
- hands shake, tremors, muscles get weak, loss of muscle tone

Adapted from the CDC:

[https://www.cdc.gov/headsup/?CDC\\_AAref\\_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/headsup/basics/concussion\\_danger\\_signs.html](https://www.cdc.gov/headsup/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/headsup/basics/concussion_danger_signs.html)

### DANGER SIGNS

A Concussion is a Type of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

All Concussions Should Be Taken Seriously.

A Head Injury Can Happen to Anyone at Any Age at Any Time.

#### Sleep Problems

- can't sleep through the night
- sleep too much
- days and nights get mixed up

#### Pain Problems

- neck and shoulder pain that happens a lot
- other unexplained body pain

### WHAT TO DO:

Seek help & referrals.

Treatment for concussion is available.

Your doctor may refer you to:

- Neurologist
- Neuropsychologist
- Specialized concussion center
- Brain injury rehabilitation center
- Specialist in your particular symptom



# Common Concussion Symptoms

## Cognitive/ Communication

- feeling dazed or in a fog
- slower to understand

## Emotional/ Behavioral

- irritability
- quick to anger
- decreased motivation
- cries easily



## Physical

- headaches or neck pain
- changes in vision
- sleep changes
- fatigue
- balance/ dizziness
- bothered by light or sounds



## Signs of Pain

- excessive crying
- anxious or agitated
- a lot of physical movement
- changes in breathing
- increased muscle tightness
- facial changes (tense or stressed)



Identifying a concussion can be more difficult in someone who communicates without words.



### Look for:

- disrupted sleep
- stomachaches
- changes in eating habits
- decreased engagement, changes with things they once loved
- poorly controlled behaviors or behaviors that change quickly
- continence issues, bedwetting or uncontrolled bladder & bowels



## What Symptoms Might Look Like

- covering, squinting or closing eyes
- changes in appetite, not eating favorite foods
- changes in sleep, night walking, not able to stay in bed for as long
- \* touching/ holding their head
- \* bothered by light or noises
- \* forgetting routines
- \* changes in any skill they already had
- \* more clingy/ emotional or withdrawn
- \* change in appetite or sleep
- \* more tantrums/ disruptive
- \* stomach issues



\* This information is adapted from a study on very young children (3-5 years old) who often don't have the words to describe their symptoms: Suskauer, S. J., Rane, S., Reesman, J., & Slomine, B. S. (2018). Caregiver-report of symptoms following traumatic brain injury in a small clinical sample of preschool-aged children. *Journal of Pediatric Rehabilitation Medicine*, 11(1), 7-14. doi:10.3233/prm-160424

**Brain Links / TN Disability Coalition**  
**615-383-9442 ~ tbi@tndisability.org**  
<https://www.tndisability.org/brain>

[@BrainLinksTN](https://www.facebook.com/BrainLinksTN) 

[YouTube Training Channel](#) 

**TN Traumatic Brain Injury Program**  
**800-882-0611**  
<https://www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/fhw/tbi.html>