

Paediatric department

Head injury in children

Head injuries are very common in children. Most are minor and it is very unlikely that your child will experience further problems. This information sheet explains how to take care of you child following a head injury and when to get urgent medical attention.

Call 999 if your child has hit their head and has:

- Been knocked out and has not woken up
- Difficulty staying awake or keeping their eyes open
- A fit (seizure)
- Problems with their vision
- Clear fluid coming from their ears or nose
- Bleeding from their ears or bruising behind their ears
- Numbness or weakness in part of their body
- Problems with their walking, balance, understanding or speaking
- Been hit in a serious accident, such as a car crash, bicycle accident not wearing a helmet, or a fall from at least 3 metres high
- Call 999 if you cannot take your child to the Emergency (A&E) Department safely.

Go to your nearest ED (A&E) if your child has:

- Been knocked out but has now woken up
- Been vomiting since the injury
- Has a headache that does not go away with painkillers
- Problems remembering things
- Problems with balance or walking normally
- Any clear fluid or bleeding from nose or ears
- Has a cut or injury which continues to bleed despite applying pressure for five minutes

- A change in behaviour such as being more irritable, easily distracted, not themselves, lacking concentration, or having no interest in things around them. This is particularly important in babies and children under five years of age.
- A large swelling to the head, especially if they are under a year of age
- Is a baby under one year of age and you are worried.

What will happen at the hospital?

Your child will be assessed for the signs of a significant head injury, such as a skull fracture or brain injury.

Your child may be given pain relief, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen if they haven't already had some. They might need a CT scan of their head, a period of observation or be sent home with advice. This will be explained and discussed with you at the time.

Any cuts or lacerations may need cleaning, and some will require Steri-strips (paper stitches) or glue. Very occasionally, stitches may be needed. You will be shown how you will need to care of any wound.

How do I look after my child at home?

Even if you do not need to seek urgent medical advice it's normal for your child to have some symptoms, and these can last up to 2 weeks.

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What symptoms can I expect my child to have?

These could include:

- Mild headache
 - Feeling sick (but not vomiting)
 - Dizziness
 - Irritability or bad temper
 - Concentration or memory problems
 - Tiredness or problems sleeping.
- ➔ If you feel concerned about any of these symptoms you should take your child to a GP.
- ➔ If these problems do not go away after 2 weeks, take your child to see a GP.

What can I do to help my child recover?

The following advice may help your child to recover more quickly:

- Do not leave your child alone in the home for the first 48 hours after a head injury.
- Do not allow them to return to school until you feel they have completely recovered.
- Make sure that there is a telephone nearby and that the child stays within easy reach of medical help
- Encourage your child to have plenty of rest and avoid stressful situations

Give your child paracetamol if they seem to be in pain. Always read the labels carefully and do not exceed the recommended dose.

- Keep your child away from situations where they might have another head injury (for example riding a bicycle, climbing) for the next 48 hours
- Avoid any contact sport such as football or rugby for 2-3 weeks.

Will my child have long-term problems after this injury?

Most children recover quickly from their accident and experience no long-term problems. However, a very small number of children do develop problems which may not be obvious until weeks or months after the injury. If you start to feel that things are not quite right for your child (for example, memory problems, or not feeling themselves), please contact their doctor as soon as possible so that he or she can check to make sure they are recovering properly.

Further information:

NHS conditions

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/minor-head-injury/>

NICE - information for the public on head injury assessment and early management

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg176/ift/chapter/Head-injuries>

Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS)

PALS can provide information, advice and support to patients and relatives and will listen to and act on your concerns, suggestions or queries.

020 8934 3993

khft.pals@nhs.net

Accessible information

We are actively working to make our patient information easier to read and accessible in a range of formats. If you would like this information in large print, audio or electronic format please speak to a member of staff in the department. If you need a different format, please let us know and we will do our best to meet your request

Pastoral & Spiritual Support Services

We offer a multi-cultural approach serving people of all faiths and life philosophies. A Duty Chaplain is available 24/7. You can request to speak to a Church of England or Roman Catholic Priest, the Rabbi or Imam.

Please call the hospital switchboard on 020 8546 7711 and ask to speak to the Duty Chaplain.

Kingston Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

Galsworthy Road
Kingston upon Thames
Surrey KT2 7QB

020 8546 7711

www.kingstonhospital.nhs.uk