What is a minor head injury?
The most common type of minor head injury is concussion. Concussion may be associated with loss of consciousness ('a blackout'). This is often brief and is normally followed by a rapid and complete recovery.

What causes a minor head injury?
The skull and facial bones are hard and they protect the brain, which is soft.

When someone has a knock to the head, their brain moves inside the skull and facial bones, and can be injured and cause a person to 'black out'. Sometimes there can be a skull fracture (although this is rare with a mild head injury).

What are the symptoms?
A person with a minor head injury may have bruising, swelling and bleeding anywhere around or inside the brain. These symptoms will vary, depending on how the injury happened.

Some people will ‘black out’ for a short period. Headache or pain is common. Some people are confused about where they are and what has happened.

Treatment
While in the emergency department, the injured person will be closely monitored and may have:

- mild painkillers for headache or pain
- nothing to eat or drink until further advised
- anti-nausea medication for any nausea or vomiting
- a CT scan of the brain, neck or bones (if needed)
- an X-ray of the neck if there is neck pain or a suspicion of neck injury
- a hard collar on their neck and be laying flat, to prevent them from moving their head, so protecting their spine.

If the injury is mild, they will be sent home with family or friends. Please ask for a certificate for work if needed

Home care
- Rest quietly for the day.
- Use ‘ice packs’ over swollen or painful areas. To do this wrap ice cubes, frozen peas or a sports ice pack in a towel. Do not put ice directly on the skin.
- Take simple painkillers (such as paracetamol) for any headache. Check the packet for the right dose and use only as directed. Aspirin should be avoided.

Some injured people may be confused or ‘groggy’, and need care and supervision over the following 24 hours.

If an injured person is discharged from hospital in the evening, they can sleep as usual and do not need to be woken overnight.

- Do not let the injured person drive home.
- Do not leave them alone for the next 24 hours.
- Do not let them drink alcohol for at least 24 hours.
- They can eat and drink as they like.
- Do not let them take sedatives or other medication unless instructed.

What to expect
Many people cannot remember events before or after their head injury (amnesia).

It can take some time for the brain to recover. During this time headaches and mild cognitive problems (such as difficulty concentrating, remembering things, performing complex tasks, and mood changes) are common. It is also normal to feel more tired than usual. See separate patient information on Concussion.

Most people make a full recovery and the symptoms last only a few days. There is no specific treatment other than plenty of rest.
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MINOR HEAD INJURY

Do not return to work or school until fully recovered. The length of time depends on the type of work or study and the severity of the head injury. Ask your local doctor for advice.

Do not return to sport until all symptoms have gone for at least a week, since this can worsen concussion symptoms. Also your reaction times and thinking will often be slower, putting you at risk of further injury. It is important to avoid another head injury before fully recovering from the first, as a second injury can cause additional damage.

Some people will have ongoing problems. If this is the case, see your local doctor or return to Cabrini ED.

Notes

Seeking help

Cabrini Emergency Department (ED) is staffed by experienced emergency doctors and nurses 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. If you have any questions about your ED treatment our qualified ED staff can be contacted on 9508 1500 at any time. If you need to return to Cabrini ED for ongoing care we would be glad to take care of you again and if this occurs within a week of your initial consultation the doctor’s fee will be bulk-billed.

In a medical emergency return to Cabrini ED if it is safe to do so or go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance (dial 000). Do this if the injured person:

- repeatedly vomits
- “blacks out”
- has a seizure (fit)
- cannot be woken or is not responsive
- has vision disturbance
- has weakness or numbness
- has severe of worsening headache

For other medical problems see your local doctor or health care professional or return to Cabrini Emergency Department.

Want to know more?

- Contact Cabrini ED on 9508 1500
- Ask your local doctor or health care professional.
- Visit the Better Health Channel
  www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

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