



HEAD INJURY!

The world is full of sharp objects and hard corners. How do you know how serious that bump is? Most kids will have falls and bumps as they venture into the world. Wiggling, walking, climbing---all these at first are great balancing acts. Fortunately most of those childhood tumbles aren't serious. The human skull is made of a lot of bony plates that protect the brain. In infants the bony plates aren't joined together yet (hence the so-called soft spot or fontanel at the top of baby's head). This gives the infant's head a special resilience that cushions falls. Miraculously enough, sometimes tiny babies sustain, with no injury, falls that would certainly cause concussion (loss of consciousness and bruising of the brain) in a grown up.

In a minor head injury the child falls, hits its head, and is momentarily stunned before starting to cry, within seconds of the blow. The child doesn't lose consciousness, not even for a few seconds. The crying might be prolonged or hysterical (falls are scary!) but this doesn't mean the child is badly injured. Once the tears are soothed away the child will go back to playing, and continue to act normally.

There might be a quickly appearing and totally lump on the child's head, a "goose egg." This is caused by bleeding into the soft tissues just under the skin. While very dramatic, this isn't dangerous. Bumps on the head appear big because they can only swell outward, limited by the protection of the hard skull.

In a moderately severe fall the child loses consciousness briefly, for a few seconds or a few minutes. This is caused by the shock of the brain shifting inside the skull. The child regains consciousness and probably cries. They might vomit, be irritable, and complain of a headache -- either immediately or up to 12 hours after the fall.

If there has been loss of consciousness or vomiting and irritability after a fall, contact your healthcare provider. Usually kids are fine in about 12 hours, but you will want your doctor's guidance and cautions.

A serious fall results in a long (several minutes) period of unconsciousness. There may be bleeding from the nose, eyes, ears, mouth. Your child may have severe irritability, prolonged or repeated vomiting, confusion, drowsiness. They may be unresponsive. Yes, a doctor should see this child as soon as possible!

Sometimes (rarely) bleeding into the brain happens during the 48 hours after a very hard fall. Symptoms include personality changes, seizures, abnormal pupil size changes, and loss of movement. These are serious symptoms and your child needs to get medical help.

Fortunately hematomas (bleeding into the brain) are rare -- they happen in only about 1 to 3% of kids who have had bad head injuries. Mild head bumps can be treated with reassurance. An ice pack will help with the swelling of the "goose egg." Symptoms of concussion in grownups are like those detailed above, and grownups too need to be checked out after a severe fall resulting in disorientation, loss of consciousness, etc.

(The above article was taken from a RRHC (Redwood Rural Health Center) article in the Southern Humboldt/ Northern Mendocino newspaper.)

If your child gets a substantial head injury at school you will be contacted and a Head Injury form with symptoms to watch for may be sent home. Your child may also receive a sticker that indicates that h/she has received a head injury so that others will be aware and watchful for symptoms.

A recommended web site is www.nationwidechildren.org