

CONCUSSION: A LESS HARSH WAY TO SAY BRAIN INJURY

According to the Centers for Disease Control, 300,000 athletes suffer from traumatic brain injuries, better known as concussions, each year. It is believed that 62,000 of these athletes are in their high school years. Recently, the severity of “concussions” has hit us close to home. A member of the Montclair High School JV football team collapsed during a game secondary to a brain hemorrhage. This athlete suffered a traumatic brain injury earlier in the season. It is likely that he suffered from second impact syndrome which is an acute brain swelling that usually occurs when a previous brain injury is not fully healed. While the chances of a catastrophic result are minimal, is the risk of “second impact syndrome” worth taking?

Children have a lot of pressure put on them to be the best they can be in sport. Between parents, coaches, and themselves, it is not uncommon for them to downplay injuries to prove they are strong. So what can you do to protect them?

First, it is important to know that no matter how old a child is, if they are participating in sport they are at risk. Head injuries most commonly occur in football, but can also occur in other sports, including soccer, basketball, softball, baseball, and ice hockey.

Next, do not overlook female athletes. Female athletes are more likely to suffer a head injury in soccer and basketball than their male counterparts participating in the same sport.

Educate yourself. It is important to be aware of all signs and symptoms of a head injury. Early signs include headache, dizziness, nausea or vomiting, and lack of awareness of surroundings. Later signs, which may occur days to weeks later, can include headaches, light-headedness, poor concentration, trouble with memory, irritability, fatigue, increased sensitivity to bright light and/or loud noises, anxiety and/or depression, and sleep disturbances. Also, a “concussion” can occur without loss of consciousness and without a direct hit to the head.

Lastly, be an advocate for your child. Talk to them about the risks of hiding injuries. Bring them to get baseline cognitive tests at local ImPACT testing facilities to assist with accurate clearance for return to sport. Stand up to the coach and your child when they are pressuring for a quick return, especially when neurological symptoms are still present. And listen to your child when they complain about not feeling well.

For further information refer www.cdc.gov/injury.

Karen Kozel
Doctor of Physical Therapy
JAG Physical Therapy, West Orange