

Suggested written discharge advice cards for:

- people 16 years and over with a head injury
- carers of people under 16 years with a head injury
- carers of people 16 years and over with a head injury

This resource is an implementation tool and should be used alongside the published guidance. The information does not supersede or replace the guidance.

© National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2023. Head injury: assessment and early management, NICE guideline 232. London (available at: www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng232)

Advice for people 16 years and over with a head injury

We have assessed your head injury and it's very unlikely to cause worrying symptoms in the coming days.

Do not stay at home alone for the first 24 hours after leaving hospital. Also, stay near a telephone for the first 24 to 48 hours in case you need to access emergency medical help.

Do not drive, cycle or operate machinery until you feel completely better. You can ask your doctor for advice about this.

When to go back to hospital

Go to your nearest hospital emergency department as soon as possible, if you develop any of these symptoms:

- unconsciousness or lack of full consciousness (for example, a problem keeping your eyes open)
- drowsiness (feeling sleepy) that lasts longer than 1 hour when you would normally be wide awake
- problems understanding or speaking
- loss of orientation (such as knowing where you are, what time of day it is, who you're with and what's going on around you)
- loss of balance or problems walking
- weakness in 1 or more arms or legs
- problems with your eyesight
- a painful headache that will not go away
- being sick
- seizures (also called convulsions or fits)
- clear fluid coming out of your ears or nose
- bleeding from 1 or both ears.

If you're unwell, get someone to take you to the emergency department or call 999 or 111.

If tests have shown you have a skull fracture

A skull fracture with no bleeding inside the skull is not usually dangerous, which is why you can go home now.

Symptoms not usually of concern

You may notice other symptoms over the next few days that should disappear in the next 2 weeks without the need for further treatment in hospital. These include:

- a mild headache
- feeling sick (without being sick)
- dizziness
- irritability or bad temper
- problems concentrating
- problems with memory
- tiredness
- lack of appetite
- problems sleeping.

See your doctor if:

- you're very concerned about any of these symptoms in the first few days after leaving hospital
- the symptoms have not gone away after 2 weeks.

What can help after a head injury?

Rest for 2 to 3 days. Then, gradually return to normal activities such as school, college or work. Be guided by your symptoms. If they get worse, go back to a level of activity that was manageable.

You can slowly return to light, non-contact exercise, gradually stepping up the amount and intensity of the exercise until you reach your normal exercise routine. This may take a few weeks.

Avoid any contact sports, such as football, rugby, boxing or martial arts, for at least 3 weeks, and until a healthcare practitioner has confirmed that you have completely recovered. If you've been told you have a skull fracture, try to minimise the risk of further head injuries by, for example, avoiding contact sports for 4 to 6 weeks.

Do not take any alcohol or illegal drugs.

Do not take sleeping pills, sedatives or tranquilisers unless a doctor has prescribed them for you.

For more information and advice, see [understanding concussion by England Rugby \(www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gfD-JFf9s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gfD-JFf9s), the [UK governments concussion guidelines for grassroots sport \(https://sportandrecreation.org.uk/policy/research-publications/concussion-guidelines\)](https://sportandrecreation.org.uk/policy/research-publications/concussion-guidelines) and [sportscotland's concussion guidance \(https://sportscotland.org.uk/clubs/scottish-sports-concussion-guidance/\)](https://sportscotland.org.uk/clubs/scottish-sports-concussion-guidance/).

Long-term problems

Most people recover quickly from a head injury and do not have any long-term problems. But some people take longer to recover, or develop problems after weeks, months or years. These problems could include but are not limited to fatigue, dizziness, imbalance, or problems with coordination, memory or vision. This is sometimes called postconcussion syndrome.

Some people develop problems with their hormones months or years after a head injury. For example, the levels of sex hormones can fall because of damage to the pituitary gland. This can cause hot flushes, fatigue, loss of body hair, reduced sex drive, irregular periods, erectile dysfunction and reduced fertility.

See your doctor as soon as possible if you have any of these problems or they do not get better within 2 weeks.

Further support and information

You can find further support and information about [long-term problems after a head injury on the Headway website \(www.headway.org.uk\)](https://www.headway.org.uk/long-term-problems-after-a-head-injury).

Telephone numbers for further advice:

NHS 111 can help if you need urgent medical help, your GP's surgery is closed or you're not sure what to do. Telephone 111.

Call 999 in a medical or mental health emergency. This is when someone is seriously ill or injured and their life is at risk.

Advice for carers of people under 16 years with a head injury

We have assessed the head injury of the baby, child or young person you are caring for and it's very unlikely to cause worrying symptoms in the coming days.

Do not leave them alone for the first 24 hours after they leave hospital. Also, make sure there's a telephone nearby for the first 24 to 48 hours in case you need to access emergency medical help.

They should not cycle, use a scooter or skateboard, or do any similar activities until they feel completely better.

When to take them back to hospital

Take them to the nearest hospital emergency department as soon as possible, if they develop any of these symptoms:

- unconsciousness or lack of full consciousness (for example, a problem keeping their eyes open)
- drowsiness (feeling sleepy) that lasts longer than 1 hour when they would normally be wide awake
- difficulty waking them up
- problems understanding or speaking
- loss of orientation (such as knowing where they are, what time of day it is, who they're with and what's going on around them)
- loss of balance or problems walking
- weakness in 1 or more arms or legs
- problems with their eyesight
- a painful headache that will not go away
- being sick
- seizures (also called convulsions or fits)
- clear fluid coming out of their ears or nose
- bleeding from 1 or both ears.

If tests have shown they have a skull fracture

A skull fracture with no bleeding inside the skull is not usually dangerous, which is why the baby, child or young person you are caring for can go home now.

Symptoms not usually of concern

The baby, child or young person may develop other symptoms over the next few days that should disappear in the next 2 weeks without the need for further treatment in hospital.

These include:

- a mild headache
- feeling sick (without being sick)
- dizziness
- irritability or bad temper
- problems concentrating
- problems with memory
- tiredness
- lack of appetite
- problems sleeping.

You should take them to see to their doctor if:

- you're very concerned about any of these symptoms in the first few days after they have left hospital
- the symptoms have not gone away after 2 weeks.

What can help after a head injury?

Make sure the baby, child or young person rests for 2 to 3 days. Then, they can gradually return to normal activities, such as school or college. Be guided by their symptoms. If their symptoms get worse, they should go back to a level of activity that was manageable.

They can slowly return to light, non-contact exercise after a few days of rest or once their symptoms are better.

They should avoid contact sports, such as football, rugby, boxing or martial arts, for at least 3 to 4 weeks after the head injury, and until a healthcare practitioner has confirmed that they have completely recovered. If you've been told they have a skull fracture, try to minimise their risk of further head injuries by, for example, making sure they avoid contact sports for 4 to 6 weeks.

They should not take any alcohol or illegal drugs.

Do not give them sleeping pills, sedatives or tranquilisers unless they've been prescribed them by a doctor.

For more information and advice, see [understanding concussion by England Rugby \(www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gfD-JFf9s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gfD-JFf9s) the [UK governments concussion guidelines for grassroots sport \(https://sportandrecreation.org.uk/policy/research-publications/concussion-guidelines\)](https://sportandrecreation.org.uk/policy/research-publications/concussion-guidelines) and [sportscotland's concussion guidance \(https://sportscotland.org.uk/clubs/scottish-sports-concussion-guidance/\)](https://sportscotland.org.uk/clubs/scottish-sports-concussion-guidance/).

Long-term problems

Most people recover quickly from a head injury and do not have any long-term problems. But some people take longer to recover, or develop problems after weeks, months or years. These problems could include but are not limited to fatigue, dizziness, or problems with coordination, memory or vision. Or, in a baby, they could include irritability, excessive crying, changes in feed or sleeping habits, and loss of interest in people or objects. This is sometimes called postconcussion syndrome.

Some people develop problems with their hormones after a head injury. This can cause fatigue, low mood, unexpected slow growth, later puberty or irregular periods (if previously regular). These may occur several months or years after the injury.

Take your baby, child or young person to see their doctor as soon as possible if they have any of these problems or do not get better within 2 weeks.

Further support and information

You can find further support and information about long-term problems after a head injury on the [Child Brain Injury Trust website](https://childbraininjurytrust.ork.uk) (<https://childbraininjurytrust.ork.uk>).

Telephone number for further advice:

NHS 111 can help if you need urgent medical help, your GP's surgery is closed or you're not sure what to do. Telephone 111.

Call 999 in a medical or mental health emergency. This is when someone is seriously ill or injured and their life is at risk.

Advice for carers of people 16 years and over with a head injury

We have assessed the head injury of the friend, relative or client you are caring for and it's very unlikely to cause worrying symptoms in the coming days.

Do not leave them alone for the first 24 hours after they leave hospital. Also, make sure there's a telephone nearby for the first 24 to 48 hours in case you need to access emergency medical help.

They should not drive, cycle or operate machinery until they feel completely better. You can ask their doctor for advice about this.

When to take them back to hospital

Take them to their nearest hospital emergency department as soon as possible, if they develop any of these symptoms:

- unconsciousness, or lack of full consciousness (for example, problems keeping their eyes open)
- drowsiness (feeling sleepy) that lasts longer than 1 hour when they would normally be wide awake
- difficulty waking them up
- problems understanding or speaking
- loss of orientation (such as knowing where they are, what time of day it is, who they're with and what's going on around them)
- loss of balance or problems walking
- weakness in 1 or more arms or legs
- problems with their eyesight
- a painful headache that will not go away
- being sick
- seizures (also called convulsions or fits)
- clear fluid coming out of their ears or nose
- bleeding from 1 or both ears.

If tests have shown they have a skull fracture

A skull fracture with no bleeding inside the skull is not usually dangerous, which is why the person you are caring for can go home now.

Symptoms not usually of concern

The person you are caring for may develop other symptoms over the next few days that should disappear in the next 2 weeks without the need for further treatment in hospital.

These include:

- a mild headache
- feeling sick (without being sick)
- dizziness
- irritability or bad temper
- problems concentrating
- problems with memory
- tiredness
- lack of appetite
- problems sleeping.

You should take them to see their doctor if:

- you're very concerned about any of these symptoms in the first few days after they have left hospital
- the symptoms have not gone away after 2 weeks.

What can help after a head injury?

Make sure the person rests for 2 to 3 days. Then, they can gradually return to normal activities, such as school, college or work. Be guided by their symptoms. If their symptoms get worse, they should go back to a level of activity that was manageable.

They can slowly return to light, non-contact exercise, gradually stepping up the amount and intensity of the exercise until they reach their normal exercise routine. This may take a few weeks.

They should avoid contact sports, such as football, rugby, boxing or martial arts, for at least 3 weeks, and until a healthcare practitioner has confirmed that they have completely recovered. If you've been told they have a skull fracture, try to minimise their risk of further head injuries by, for example, making sure they avoid contact sports for 4 to 6 weeks.

They should not take any alcohol or illegal drugs.

They should not take sleeping pills, sedatives or tranquilisers unless they've been prescribed them by a doctor.

For more information and advice, see [understanding concussion by England Rugby \(www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gfD-JFf9s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gfD-JFf9s) the [UK governments concussion guidelines for grassroots sport \(https://sportandrecreation.org.uk/policy/research-publications/concussion-guidelines\)](https://sportandrecreation.org.uk/policy/research-publications/concussion-guidelines) and [sportscotland's concussion guidance \(https://sportscotland.org.uk/clubs/scottish-sports-concussion-guidance/\)](https://sportscotland.org.uk/clubs/scottish-sports-concussion-guidance/).

Long-term problems

Most people recover quickly from a head injury and do not have any long-term problems. But some people take longer to recover, or develop problems after weeks, months or years. These problems could include but are not limited to fatigue, dizziness, or problems with coordination, memory or vision. This is sometimes called postconcussion syndrome.

Occasionally, hormonal problems can occur after a head injury, which could include fatigue, hair loss and irregular periods. These may occur several months or years after the injury.

Take the person you are caring for to see their doctor as soon as possible if they have any of these problems or do not get better within 2 weeks.

Further support and information

You can find further support and information on [long-term problems after a head injury on the Headway website \(www.headway.org.uk\)](http://www.headway.org.uk).

Telephone number for further advice:

NHS 111 can help if you need urgent medical help, your GP's surgery is closed or you're not sure what to do. Telephone 111.

Call 999 in a medical or mental health emergency. This is when someone is seriously ill or injured and their life is at risk.