Preventing Head Injuries

Bumps and falls are typical in childhood and adolescence. While these injuries can be upsetting, most head injuries are minor and not associated with brain injury or long-term complications. Even though, it is important to know when to seek medical attention and how to prevent serious head injuries.

SYMPTOMS

A child’s behavior and symptoms after a head injury depend on the type and severity of the injury. Short falls, being hit at a low speed or by soft objects have a much lower risk of injury than incidents involving greater impact. High forces, such as high speed motor vehicle crashes, falls from large heights, being hit by a high speed, heavy or sharp object (such as a baseball or golf club), or inflicted injury (abuse) increase the risk of brain injury. The most common symptoms of head injury include:

• Scalp swelling: The scalp has many blood vessels. If the skin is not broken, a large lump develops from bleeding or swelling under the skin.

• Headache: About 45 percent of children/adolescents develop a headache after a head injury. In young children who are not able to speak, irritability may be a sign of a headache or other pain.

• Vomiting: Approximately 10 percent of children/adolescents vomit at least once after a head injury. Children who vomit do not necessarily have a serious brain injury.

• Loss of consciousness: Around 5 percent of children/adolescents with a mild head injury lose consciousness or “pass out.”

• Concussion is the term used to describe a mild form of traumatic brain injury. Multiple concussions can permanently damage the brain. Signs of a possible concussion include feeling dizzy, lightheaded, dazed, experiencing memory loss, vomiting, headaches, blurred vision, sensitivity to light, confusion, problems concentrating and having difficulty with coordination.
SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION
For more than a light bump on the head, it is recommended to contact your child’s healthcare provider for guidance. If your child is younger than 6 months or experiencing any of the following symptoms after a head injury, seek medical attention right away:

• Recurrent vomiting
• Loss of consciousness
• Seizure
• Severe or worsening headache
• Changes in behavior (difficult to wake, extremely irritable, or any other concerning behaviors)
• Difficulty walking, stumbling
• Confusion
• Slurred speech
• Dizziness that does not get better or gets better, then returns
• Vision changes, including blurred or double vision or unequal pupil sizes
• Blood or watery fluid oozing from the nose or ears
• Neck pain or stiffness

PREVENTION
Falls are the most common cause of minor head injury in children and adolescents, followed by motor vehicle crashes, pedestrian and bicycle accidents, sports-related trauma, and child abuse. Head injuries can often be prevention by taking these precautions:

• All bicycle riders should wear a properly fitting helmet every time.
• Utilize a correctly installed and appropriately sized car seat, booster seat or seatbelt every time a child/adolescent rides in the car.
• Use gates on stairways and doors to prevent injuries to infants and young children, do not use wheeled baby walkers and install window guards on all windows above the first floor.
• Be sure your child or adolescent always wears the appropriate protective equipment for biking, skating, skateboarding, skiing, snowboarding or contact sports.
• Always closely supervise children at play.

Healthy Recipe: PB & S Toast (great after school or before bed snack)
Toast one slice of whole wheat bread, spread with 1 tablespoon natural peanut butter (or nut-butter alternative) and top with fresh strawberry halves. If you have an extra 5 minutes, make this into a “quesadilla” spread peanut butter (or nut butter alternative) on ½ of a wheat tortilla, top with cut strawberries, fold the tortilla in half and brown in a skillet.

Activity: Monday walk night
As the school year begins, make a goal to go for a walk before or after supper as a family one night a week. Making it a scheduled event helps the activity become a habit. Use the time to talk with your child about plans for the week ahead or what is happening at school. If children become uninterested, switch it up by changing the activity. Take turns choosing, but make a ground rule that everybody participates, even if it means trying a new activity. This helps keep the habit going, even as the seasons change.

Sources: