

WAKE UP TO CONCUSSIONS

The most common head injury in sport is concussion. Riding of any kind – not just jumping, ranks third in the number of concussions sustained by adults. This brochure is designed to help riders recognize concussion in the field so that **appropriate medical assessment and management can follow.**

Riding is a contact sport - just like football, soccer, skiing or boxing. Every rider may someday fall and hit their head on the ground or another hard object. No matter how good or experienced the rider, no matter how gentle the horse, no matter how safe the environment or the 'job' of that ride, anyone can hit their head due to a fall off their horse. Even you. That fall could cause *a concussion, an injury to the brain specifically caused by a trauma to the head.*

Chances are you'll never need to know about concussions. But, just in case you or someone you train, judge or watch falls off a horse and hits their head, here are some answers to commonly asked questions about concussions.

Wake Up to Concussions: Be ready to ask these questions and know these answers.

Do you always lose consciousness when you have a concussion?

No! Only 5 concussions in 100 involve any loss of consciousness. **Almost all mild concussions occur without any loss of consciousness.**

What are some key symptoms of a mild concussion?

- Feeling like “you had your bell rung” or getting “dinged” or “seeing stars”
- Not knowing what happened (little or no memory) just before and/or just after a fall
- Headache
- Loss of balance and/or equilibrium
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Fuzzy and/or blurry vision
- Poor concentration or inability to carry out a set of simple instructions
- Drowsiness and/or fatigue
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Poor memory or forgetfulness about “routine” things like “losing” your keys
- Irritability or unusual aggressiveness

Wake Up to When a Rider Hits Her Head due to a Fall Off Her Horse

What to ask a rider immediately after she hits her head due to a fall even if she does not appear to look symptomatic – dizzy, confused, out of balance, etc.

- What day is it?

- What is the name of the competition?
- In what place or town is the competition located?
- What was your start time?
- What number is your next fence?

What happens if the rider answers all the questions correctly and appears to be physically all right?

The rider can immediately continue with the course.

What happens if the rider misses questions and appears confused?

The rider ought to be held and observed for 15 minutes.

What happens if the rider answers all the questions correctly after 15 minutes and appears to be physically all right?

The rider can continue on course or can ride his additional horse(s) in the competition.

What happens if symptom(s) continue after 15 minutes?

- The rider competing day is over.
- The rider *should not* be left alone at the barn
- The rider should be transported for medical evaluation.

What happens if symptom(s) appear to worsen in those 15 minutes? (For example, the rider gets a headache or becomes dizzy, nauseated, confused, etc.)

The rider should be transported to a medical facility for evaluation. **Remember, the rider does not have to lose consciousness to sustain a concussion.**

What happens if the rider loses consciousness for any period of time (10 seconds, 1 minute, etc.) as a result of the fall?

The rider should be transported immediately to a medical facility for evaluation.

Wake Up to Concussions

Are there different types or grades of mild concussion?

Mild concussions can be divided into 3 types. **Grade 1 concussions are far and away the most common riding trauma.**

- **Grade 1** - no loss of consciousness, no confusion at all, no key symptoms after 15 minutes
- **Grade 2** – no loss of consciousness, transient confusion, one or more key symptom(s) after 15 minutes
- **Grade 3** – loss of consciousness for **any** period of time (10 seconds, 1 minute, etc.)

Are some folks more likely to get a concussion?

Yes, adolescents and young adults (ages 15-24), people over 65 and women are more vulnerable to head injury.

Wake Up to a Second Injury Before the Concussion Heals

During the recovery period from concussion, people are at risk for other types of additional accident or injury. In a fit, healthy, person a second trauma to an already injured head that has not yet completely healed may have disproportional consequences. It **does not** matter how mild a second hit nor does it matter what causes a second trauma, hit, snap or jerk to the head. It could be as simple as a friendly slap on the back or being rear-ended in a traffic accident.

It is **essential** that the brain be given adequate time to “heal” from **any** concussion. The concussion, the head trauma is what matters, not the fall from a horse, the traffic accident, or another sports related injury such as skiing, soccer, etc. **There are serious risks if the brain is not allowed to completely heal from a concussion. A rare but catastrophic risk could be Second Impact Syndrome, which can be fatal. Second Impact Syndrome is no joke.**

Protect yourself from repeated head injury before the original concussion has healed. Do not ride or participate in any other sport until all symptoms of a first concussion are totally and completely resolved.

Never - ever, “tough out” a concussion. The saying “no pain, no gain” does not apply to concussions!

Wake Up to Reasonable Return to Riding

Recovery and management of concussion should follow physicians’ instructions. The following are minimum guidelines for returning to play in the horse sports.

How long should the rider wait before riding again after sustaining a concussion?*

- **Grade 1** – same day only if no symptoms **after** waiting 15 minutes
- **Grade 2** – one week only **after** there are no symptoms both at rest and during exertion **and** being medically cleared by physician
- **Grade 3** – should be assessed by physician regularly until all symptoms completely resolved - two weeks **after** there are no symptoms both at rest and during exertion **and** being medically cleared by physician

After multiple concussions, it may be necessary for the rider to discontinue the sport for the season. In rare occasion, the rider may need to reconsider the sport.

Remember, all concussions count – it doesn’t matter if traumas to the head are caused by falls from horses, car accidents, other sports related injuries such as skiing or soccer, or falls against a hard surface like the floor, a rock or a tree.

* Individual differences and medical history may increase time required before returning to the playing field.

For more information about the management of concussion in sport contact: Brain Injury Association at (800)444 6442 or www.headinjury.com or brain@headinjury.com; the Centers for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov/ncip/tbi; or the USEA Safety Committee concussion@equestriansafety.com.

Return to Play: When Can I ride

Wake Up to Concussions: recovery

All concussions should be medically assessed and managed. Recovery and management of each individual's concussion should follow physicians instructions. The following information is provided to give some ideas for returning to activity. This information is for educational purposes and is not meant to replace medical diagnosis and supervision of concussion.

How and when can I ride again?

When you have been free of all symptoms for at least 24 hours, you can start activity.

Once completely asymptomatic for at least 24 hours, what physical activities can I do?

It is common for any symptom(s) to return with increased levels of exertion. If any symptom(s) re-occurs when beginning light exertion movement, go back to complete rest. From no activity and complete rest, the rider can begin with light aerobic exercise such as walking or stationary cycling to confirm her/his balance and equilibrium for short periods of time. If symptom(s) do return with increased levels of exertion, drop back to the previous asymptomatic level.

Once back to riding, begin with hacking work to confirm concentration and memory. Then the rider can progress to anaerobic work, galloping or jumping. ***Again, it is common for any symptom(s) to return with increased levels of exertion.*** If any symptom(s) do return, drop back to the previous asymptomatic level and try the progression again.

Return to competition only after riding at a high level of work for 5 – 7 consecutive days without any recurring symptoms.

Wake Up to Concussions

What if the rider has another falls and sustains a second or third concussion?

Concussions can have a cumulative effect over time and successive ones over a lifetime may take longer to heal. Recovery speed will vary among individuals and requires medical supervision.

- **2nd Grade 1 concussion** – return to riding only 1 week ***after*** there are no symptoms both at rest and during exertion ***and*** being medically cleared by a physician

- **3rd Grade 1 concussion** – return to riding only 1 month *after* there are no symptoms both at rest and during exertion *and* being medically cleared by a physician
- **2nd Grade 2 concussion** – return to riding only 1 month *after* there are no symptoms both at rest and during exertion *and* being medically cleared by physician
- **3rd Grade 2 concussion** – rider should consider sitting out remainder of season and/or return to riding only 3 – 6 months *after* there are no symptoms both at rest and during exertion *and* being medically cleared by physician
- **2nd Grade 3 concussion** – return to riding only 3 – 6 months *after* there are no symptoms both at rest and during exertion *and* being medically cleared by physician and/or should consider sitting out remainder of season
- **3rd Grade 3 concussion** - do not return to riding for 3 – 6 months and/or *remainder* of the season *regardless* if there are no symptoms at rest and during exertion during that period.

After multiple concussions, it may be necessary for the rider to consider discontinuing contact sports. Remember, all concussions count – it doesn't matter if traumas to the head are caused by falls from horses, car accidents, other sports related injuries such as skiing or soccer, or falls against a hard surface like the floor, a rock or a tree.

Wake Up to Concussions

- The most common head injury in sports is concussion
- Riding is a contact sport, just like football, soccer, skiing, boxing, etc.
- Take responsibility for your own riding.
- Know your personal concussion history. Make a list of *all* remembered/known concussions - include all traumas to the head (car accident, skiing, cycling, etc.) regardless of the cause(s).
- Pay attention to any key symptom(s) you may have as a result of hitting your head caused by falling off your horse
- Seek medical advice/evaluation if any symptom(s) persist.
- *Never* “tough out” any symptom(s) of concussion.

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