

Concussion Myths

Concussion myth #1: Rest is Best

Facts: This was the approach for years because asking people to engage in certain activities would potentially result in a temporary increase in symptoms. However, ongoing research continues to point to the positives of active recovery approaches and activating as soon as 24 hours following injury can help expedite the concussion recovery process. This is due to multiple reasons including counteracting the disruption to cerebral blood flow with exercise and physical activity, preventing potential decompensation of systems in the brain, and/or development of compensatory strategies (self-protection, environmental modification). Certain systems (e.g., vestibular, ocular) also need re-strengthening with some concussions, and this can be done through exposures, physical therapy, etc.

Concussion myth #2: Concussions cause long-term damage

Facts: The vast majority of concussions allow for complete recovery to normal functioning. In some instances, patients may have persisting symptoms; however, this is typically due to pre-existing risk factors. For example, concussion can exacerbate pre-existing symptoms such as anxiety or headaches. Additionally, if somebody has a predisposition towards potentially developing regular headaches (e.g., they have a significant family history of headaches), the concussion can expedite the development of headaches, making them more regular in that individual.

Concussion Myth #3 Causing myself symptoms is doing damage to the brain

Facts: Concussion does not cause any structural damage to the brain. Concussions are the result of an acute energy crisis, which will inevitably resolve within two months of injury (at most). Participating in any activities that cause a temporary increase in symptoms might make you feel uncomfortable and/or symptomatic; however, this does not lead to any actual damage to the brain. In fact, pushing through a *moderate* level of symptoms should enable you to recover more quickly.

Concussion Myth #4 Concussion will increase my risk of later neurodegenerative disorder

Facts: So long as individuals are recovering from each individual concussion and are not experiencing any significantly decreased threshold for concussion over time, there is no research that suggests that concussions can increase risk of future development of a neurodegenerative disorder.

Concussion Myth #5 Concussions will cause mental health issues later in life

Facts: Concussions can cause a temporary increase in anxiety/depression during recovery but there is currently no link between concussion and later development of suicidality or mental health difficulties later in life.

Concussion Myth #6: I should not sleep immediately after my concussion

Facts: So long as there have been no serious signs of a more serious injury such as a brain bleed (e.g., repetitive vomiting, disorientation or change in mental status, severe headache that does not disappear, slurred speech, seizure/coma), there is no concern anymore for sleeping following a concussion. This will not do the brain any damage. However, if more serious symptoms occur, it is important to follow up for some brain imaging.