

**Volume 13, Issue 5****Heads-Up: What You Need to Know About Concussions in the Workplace**

In recent years, concussions in professional athletes have received significant media attention. However, concussions can occur anywhere, including in the workplace. Statistics reveal that the number of time loss claims for work-related concussions increased by 371% in Ontario from 2004 to 2013. This increase is likely due in part to increased reporting and awareness of this injury. However, research shows that there is a general lack of understanding about concussion and how it is managed at the workplace.

What are concussions?

A concussion is the most common form of traumatic brain injury. It is caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or by a hit to the body that causes the head and brain to move back and forth rapidly. A concussion may or may not involve a loss of consciousness. You do not have to black out, or be knocked out, to experience a concussion, however if a concussion results in a loss of consciousness it is considered a “critical injury”, an injury that is life threatening. Concussion may result in an altered mental status that affects cognitive (e.g. thinking, memory, learning) and physical performance. Symptoms after concussion usually resolve within weeks but can persist.

How do concussions occur?

Concussions occur when the brain is injured after a traumatic event, such as a blow to the head. However, you do not have to hit your head to suffer a concussion. It is possible to have a concussion due to whiplash, or rapid rotation, shaking or jerking of the head or even the body. On a worksite, hazards that may cause a fall, slips and trips, and vehicle collisions can result in injuries that can lead to concussions.

In Canada, the highest rates of workplace concussions are in the transportation, storage, government, and primary industries (e.g. forestry, fishing, and mining). The most common cause of workplace brain injuries overall are falls, being struck by or against an object, and motor vehicle collisions. However, the main causes of work-related concussion vary by industry and occupation.

Signs and symptoms

Signs and symptoms of a concussion include a new onset of one or more of the following symptoms, but are not limited to:

- loss of consciousness
- headache (or a sensation of pressure in your head)
- nausea or vomiting
- dizziness
- seeing stars or lights
- blurred or double vision
- slurred speech
- balance problems
- sensitivity to light and/or noise
- difficulty concentrating
- difficulty remembering
- confusion, drowsiness, and an incoherent thought process.

Some symptoms may not be present immediately after the injury, but may emerge in the subsequent hours or days. It is therefore important to monitor for symptoms several days following a head injury.

How to manage a concussion

Workers who experience any of the above symptoms after an injury should alert a supervisor and seek immediate medical attention. It is important to consult with a medical professional on how best to manage a concussion. Someone with a suspected concussion should not be left alone or drive.

With proper diagnosis and treatment, most people with concussions recover fully within a short period of time. In some cases, symptoms linger for weeks or months making it challenging to resume normal activities or return to work. The ability to return-to-work can be influenced by co-existing medical conditions and an individual's concussion history.

Preventing concussion

The following tips may help prevent concussions in the workplace:

- Remove tripping hazards. Make sure walkways and work spaces are free of clutter, cords, puddles of water, or anything else that can cause a slip, trip or fall.
- Use proper signage to alert employees of wet surfaces.
- Keep shelves and storage areas and your work space clean and organized to avoid falling objects.
- In a warehouse or storage facility, place the heaviest objects on the floor or the lowest possible shelving.
- Wear the proper type of safety footwear to prevent falls if you work in slippery, icy or other types of rugged terrain.
- Do not stand on chairs, desks or tables, but rather use an appropriate step stool, access platform, or

ladder to avoid falls.

- Use caution when working from heights. Know how to use fall protection and fall restraint equipment.
- If a job requires wearing a hard hat, make sure it's appropriate to the job, properly fitted, and in good condition.
- Report all unsafe conditions to the nearest supervisor.

Note: This article was developed in part in consultation with "Traumatic Brain Injury in the Workplace: Innovations for Prevention study team" funded by a grant by the Ontario Ministry of Labour. Please visit www.abiresearch.utoronto.ca (<http://www.abiresearch.utoronto.ca>).

Additional Resources

- [Guidelines for mild traumatic brain injury and persistent symptoms \(http://onf.org/system/attachments/60/original/Guidelines_for_Mild_Traumatic_Brain_Injury_and_Persistent_Symptoms.pdf\)](http://onf.org/system/attachments/60/original/Guidelines_for_Mild_Traumatic_Brain_Injury_and_Persistent_Symptoms.pdf), Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation (PDF)
- [Program of care for mild traumatic brain injuries \(http://www.wsib.on.ca/WSIBPortal/faces/WSIBArticlePage?fGUID=835502100635000412&_afLoop=4984702138610778&_afWindowMode=0&_afWindowId=null#%40%3F_afWindowId%3Dnull%26_afLoop%3D4984702138610778%26_afWindowMode%3D0%26fGUID%3D835502100635000412&_afWindowMode=0&_afWindowId=null#state%3Dggac3ygl2_14\)](http://www.wsib.on.ca/WSIBPortal/faces/WSIBArticlePage?fGUID=835502100635000412&_afLoop=4984702138610778&_afWindowMode=0&_afWindowId=null#%40%3F_afWindowId%3Dnull%26_afLoop%3D4984702138610778%26_afWindowMode%3D0%26fGUID%3D835502100635000412&_afWindowMode=0&_afWindowId=null#state%3Dggac3ygl2_14), Workers Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB)
- [By the Numbers: 2013 WSIB Statistical Report \(http://wsibstatistics.ca/WSIB-StatisticalReport_S2.pdf\)](http://wsibstatistics.ca/WSIB-StatisticalReport_S2.pdf), Workers Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB)
- [Concussion resources \(http://horizon.parachutecanada.org/en/?s=concussion\)](http://horizon.parachutecanada.org/en/?s=concussion), Parachute Canada
- [Preventing Falls From Slips and Trips \(http://www.ccohs.ca/products/courses/preventing_falls/\)](http://www.ccohs.ca/products/courses/preventing_falls/) e-course, CCOHS
- [Occupational Health and Safety Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. O.1. \(http://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90o01\)](http://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90o01)
- [Brain Injury Safety Tips and Prevention \(http://www.cdc.gov/headsup/basics/concussion_prevention.html\)](http://www.cdc.gov/headsup/basics/concussion_prevention.html), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

The [Health and Safety Report \(http://www.ccohs.ca/newsletters/hsreport/\)](http://www.ccohs.ca/newsletters/hsreport/), a free monthly newsletter produced by the [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety \(http://www.ccohs.ca\)](http://www.ccohs.ca) (CCOHS), provides information, advice, and resources that help support a safe and healthy work environment and the total well being of workers.

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