

Patient information factsheet

Head injury

It is unlikely that you will have any further problems. However, if you develop any of the following symptoms please seek urgent medical advice.

- Unconsciousness, or deterioration in conscious level/increased drowsiness (for example, problems keeping eyes open or being hard to rouse).
- Any new or increased confusion (not knowing where you are, getting things muddled up).
- Any new or worsening problems with swallowing, speaking, eyesight or eyelid closure, hearing or facial movement.
- Any loss of balance or new problems standing or walking with new weakness in one or both arms or legs.
- Very painful headaches that will not go away.
- More than one episode of vomiting.
- Any fits (collapsing or passing out suddenly).
- Any clear fluid coming out of your ears or nose, which has developed since leaving hospital.
- Any bleeding from one or both ears, or new deafness.

Things you shouldn't worry about

Commonly after head injury people can experience some uncomfortable symptoms, which include mild headaches, feeling sick (but without vomiting), blurred or double vision, dizziness, irritability or bad temper, problems concentrating or problems with your memory, tiredness, lack of appetite or problems sleeping.

These should improve and disappear over time, depending on the severity of your injury. If you feel concerned about any of these symptoms you should discuss them with your GP and contact the hospital head injury outreach specialist nurse.

Things that will help you get better

By following this advice you should get better more quickly and safely:

- Do not stay at home alone for the first 48 hours after leaving hospital and stay within easy reach of a telephone, should you need medical help.
- Do have plenty of rest and avoid stressful situations.
- Do not drink any alcohol until you are symptom-free from your head injury. Both alcohol and recreational drugs are associated with an increased risk of further injury.
- Do not take sleeping pills, sedatives or tranquilisers unless given by a doctor who knows of your condition.
- Do not return to your normal school, college or work activity until you feel you have completely recovered (you may need a sick certificate). Consider a gradual return if this is helpful.
- If you have not been given specific advice regarding return to driving, we would recommend you seek your doctor's opinion about your ability to drive a car, motorbike or cycle safely on the road. You should not consider this until you feel you have completely recovered from your injury.
- Do seek medical advice if you have any redness, inflammation or discharge from a head wound.
- Depending on your injuries (for example, if just head and facial or orthopaedic injuries) you will need to check with the relevant medical teams as to when it would be safe to return to heavy physical activity or contact sports. This advice will vary depending on the extent of your injuries.

Long-term problems

Most patients recover quickly from their accident and experience no long-term problems, but occasionally some patients may go on to experience delayed complications.

If you find you are experiencing difficulties with your thinking, memory and concentration, or changes in your mood, then please discuss this with your GP and contact the head injury outreach specialist nurse.

Follow up

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommends that anyone who has been admitted to hospital with a head injury should see their GP a week after leaving hospital. You should therefore make an appointment with your GP.

Some patients will also need to be seen in an outpatient clinic several weeks after their head injury. You may receive an appointment for this.

Further information

If you have any queries consider contacting your GP, the hospital emergency department (telephone 023 8079 6220), the ward you were on, or NHS Direct (0845 4647).

Further information on head injury is available from Headway, a national charity. Telephone Headway Southampton on 023 8070 2326 or go to www.headway.org.uk

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please telephone 023 8079 4688 for help.