

Patient information factsheet

Head injury

This factsheet contains information that you and your family or carers may find useful after your head injury. Please keep it in a safe place in case you need to refer to it later.

If you develop any of the following symptoms please seek urgent medical advice:

- unconsciousness, deterioration in conscious level or increased drowsiness (for example, problems keeping eyes open or being hard to wake)
- new or increased confusion (not knowing where you are, getting things muddled up)
- new or worsening problems with swallowing, speaking, eyesight or eyelid closure, hearing or facial movement
- 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
- repeated vomiting (being sick)
- fits (collapsing or passing out suddenly)
- clear fluid coming out of your ears or nose, which has developed since leaving hospital
- bleeding from one or both ears, or new deafness

Things you shouldn't worry about

Symptoms which are to be expected after a head injury include:

- mild headaches
- feeling sick (but without vomiting)
- ongoing blurred or double vision
- dizziness
- irritability or bad temper
- problems concentrating or with your memory
- tiredness
- lack of appetite
- problems with sleeping

These symptoms are common and should improve 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 or contact the hospital head injury nurse specialist.

General advice after a head injury

Do

- do get plenty of rest and avoid stressful situations
- do seek medical advice if you have redness, inflammation or discharge from a head wound
- do keep within easy reach of a telephone in case you need medical help
- do make an appointment with your GP to discuss your injury

Do not

- do not stay at home alone for the first 48 hours after leaving hospital. Keep within easy reach of a telephone, in case you need medical help.
- do not drink any alcohol until you are free of symptoms from your head injury. Both alcohol and recreational drugs are associated with an increased risk of further injury.

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- do not take any sleeping pills, sedatives or tranquilisers unless given by a doctor who knows of your condition.
- do not return to your normal college or work activity until you feel you have completely recovered (you may need a sick certificate). Consider a gradual or phased return if this is helpful.

Returning to normal activities and driving

If you have not been given specific advice regarding return to driving, we would recommend you contact the DVLA before you drive a car, motorbike or ride a bicycle on the road. Only consider these activities once you feel you have completely recovered from your injury.

Depending on your 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.

Air travel

Some people may find that flying makes their symptoms worse. If you intend to fly within three months of your injury, check with your doctor or the head injury specialist nurses, especially if you have suffered seizures, bleeding within the brain or a skull fracture.

Long-term problems

Most patients recover quickly from their injury and experience no long-term problems. However, some people may go on to experience delayed complications. If you find you are experiencing difficulties, such as problems with your thinking, memory and concentration or changes in your mood, then please discuss this with your GP and contact the head injury nurse specialist.

Follow-up

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. This will depend on the severity of your head injury. You will be advised if you need a follow-up.

Further information

If you have any head injury concerns or queries, please contact the head injury nurse specialist (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4.30pm) via the hospital switchboard on telephone: **02380 777 222** or on the numbers given during your stay in hospital.

Further information on head injuries is available from Headway, a national charity. Telephone Headway Southampton on **023 8086 2948** or go to **www.headway.org.uk**

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For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport**