

Concussion & Mental Health

Introduction

Concussions have been known to have a detrimental effect upon mental health. The frequency of this is subject to debate, but some studies have shown as many as 1 in 5 who have sustained a concussion reported adverse mental health in the months following the injury.

What mental health conditions can occur after a concussion?

A number of mental health issues have been reported following a concussion. These include:

- Depression
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Anxiety
- Mood swings
- Irritability
- Suicidal Ideation

Having a pre-existing mental health issue is a particularly strong risk factor for developing a worsening of symptoms following a concussion.

How does a concussion impact upon mental health?

The mechanism by which a concussion can lead to issues with mental health isn't entirely clear. Mental health issues are often multi-factorial, so it may be that there is more than one cause responsible.

It could be that there is a disruption to the neural pathways in the brain that control emotions, but this has yet to be conclusively proven.

There are a number of other factors that are likely to contribute, too.

Feeling unwell

Initial symptoms can be frightening, particularly if severe. Headaches, fatigue and dizziness are common, and patients will often report feeling 'slowed down' or 'not themselves'. Symptoms can lead to anxiety about the future.

- *How long am I going to feel like this?*
- *Will this affect my exam performance my grades?*
- *Will I ever be able to play sport again?*
- *What does this mean long-term for my brain?*



Social isolation

A concussion can lead to isolation and loneliness. Patients are told to stay off their phones to reduce screen time, and that they can't attend social events or sporting fixtures. These adaptations, although often required and always well-meaning, can be hugely disruptive.

Difficulties with concentration

Concentration or focus can also be affected in the early stages following a concussion. Difficulties in completing tasks can be upsetting, and very quickly lead to catastrophizing.

- *If I can't concentrate in this lesson, I'm never going to be able to finish this assignment*
- *My grades are going to be affected and I won't get a place at my university*

Sleep

Sleep can be adversely affected after a concussion, and this in turn can affect mental health, ability to function, and sense of wellbeing. Sleep hygiene measures are covered in detail in as separate document found [here](#)

What to do if you are concerned

If you have concerns about symptoms related to mental health, you can book a review with any Return2Play clinician to discuss. This is particularly important when it comes to advice around participation in events and screen usage in the early stages following the injury.

Staying in contact with friends or teammates can help with feelings of isolation, and reassuring yourself or your loved one that in most cases concussion symptoms settle within a week or two.

Counselling services may be available through your school or work, and may be of particular benefit. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) has also been shown to be effective in such situations. It might be possible to access psychological support via your GP.

If you have any immediate concerns about your or your child's safety, or the symptoms deteriorate significantly, you should call 111 or attend your local Accident & Emergency Department.

