

# Head bump? here's signs you need ER care

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Knowing the signs of brain injury and when to seek emergency care could save a life, an expert says.

"The brain is the body's command center," said Dr. Gillian Schmitz, president of the American College of Emergency Physicians. "One of the smartest ways to protect it is to be able to spot the signs of a brain injury and to go to the closest emergency department when you need medical attention."

A [traumatic brain injury](#) (TBI) is an injury that disrupts brain function. The most common type is a [concussion](#), which can be caused by a fall, sports injury, traffic accident or an incident at home.

While some symptoms of a concussion can take hours or days to appear, ignoring the signs of a [brain](#) injury can put a person at risk of complications. Signs of confusion or disorientation likely indicate that a head injury has occurred, and anyone who appears unsteady requires immediate medical attention.

The college recommends you seek emergency care if there are any of these signs of severe head injury:

- Headaches that worsen despite taking over-the-counter medications.
- Weakness, numbness or decreased coordination.
- Slurred speech, or trouble walking.
- Increased confusion or agitation.
- Repeated vomiting.
- Loss of consciousness for more than one minute.
- Unequal pupil sizes.
- Convulsions or seizures.
- Unusual changes in sleep patterns or mood.

With an infant or young child, seek emergency treatment if the youngster:

- Exhibits any of the warning signs for adults.
- Won't stop crying, refuses to eat or nurse, or cannot be consoled.
- Is an infant and has bulging in the soft spot on the front of the head.
- Shows any sign of skull trauma or abnormality, such as bruising on the scalp or a depressed area where an injury occurred.

Vomiting is common in young children, so medical attention for a suspected head injury may only be necessary if a child vomits repeatedly in a short period, more than once or twice within an hour.

"The two easiest ways for anyone to avoid a concussion are to wear protective equipment during recreational activities and eliminate the hazards that can cause falls at home," Schmitz said in a college news release. "Head injuries can seem scary, but most are mild—prompt medical attention from an emergency physician can make all the difference."

More than 2.8 million people a year suffer a [brain injury](#), according to the Brain Injury Association of America, and they are a leading cause of [injury-related deaths](#).

March is Brain Injury Awareness Month.

**More information:** There's more on traumatic brain injury at the [U.S. National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke](#).

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