

Concussion Management: A First and Vital Step

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Like so many Canadians, I tuned in to the Stanley Cup Playoffs last month. I cheered when the Penguins became the first team in two decades to successively defend Lord Stanley's coveted trophy. But this year's playoffs had me thinking about something else: concussion management.

Besides being a fan of hockey and Sidney Crosby, I'm also a physiotherapist. I've worked with patients who have experienced brain injuries and know that it only takes one concussion to cause serious harm. Fortunately, the Penguins' star has access to experts who can help assess, treat and manage the impact of the concussions he has experienced. Not everyone is so fortunate.

Diagnosing and managing a concussion is best done on a case-by-case basis under the guidance of a trained health care professional. However, there are common signs and symptoms. These include headache, pressure in the head, neck pain, confusion, drowsiness, trouble falling asleep, irritability, becoming more emotional, or just not feeling right. Long term, depression can also result from a concussion. More information on these and other signs and symptoms is available on the Nova Scotia Physiotherapy Association [website](#). Our goal is to support and encourage awareness: a first and vital step in concussion management.

There are common misconceptions about concussion. Despite the evidence, many people still view concussions as minor injuries. This is a potentially damaging myth. A concussion needs to be treated comprehensively and carefully. Another misconception is that a person must be hit in the head in order to experience a concussion. A significant jolt to the body may cause enough acceleration

or deceleration to result in a concussion. A third misconception is that concussions are easy to spot. The reality is that a person may look and think they are fine following an injury and then feel the ill effects later.

If you or someone you love has experienced a concussion, get help from a health care provider such as a physician. Once a diagnosis has been confirmed, a physiotherapist can create a customized individual treatment plan. We help manage symptoms such as headache, neck pain, dizziness, balance problems and guide a progressive return to sport, work or other daily activities. Many physiotherapists also work with teams in high-risk sports, such as hockey and soccer, providing comprehensive baseline concussion tests for athletes before the season begins. These tests help determine an accurate diagnosis and identify an approach for recovery, including when an athlete is ready to return to play.

Concussions happen as the result of all sorts of activities or events that can't necessarily be foreseen or prevented and may have nothing to do with playing a sport. However a concussion occurs, its management begins with knowing the signs and seeking medical help.