

Protecting against head injuries

Head injuries can have serious and long-lasting consequences. However, head injuries can be prevented or minimized by taking proper precautions (see “Preventing Head Injuries” below).

An article in the September 8, 1999, issue of *JAMA* reports on the recommendations of a panel of experts regarding rehabilitation therapy for people who have experienced

traumatic brain injury (brain injuries caused by trauma, such as vehicle crashes, firearms, falls, violent assaults, or sports injuries). The panel recommends that rehabilitation services be matched to each individual’s special needs and that the patients and their families should play an important role in the planning and design of the therapy program.

PREVENTING HEAD INJURIES:

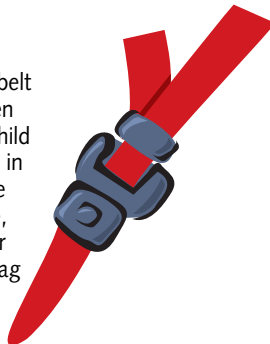
- Wear a helmet and other appropriate protective gear when riding a bicycle or motorcycle, and for other sports and recreational activities, such as rollerskating, inline skating, skateboarding, and horseback riding, that may result in head injury



- Do not drink alcohol or drink only in moderation



- Wear a safety belt and put children in infant and child car seats when in a motor vehicle and, if possible, make sure your car has an airbag



- Make sure your house is safe for children and elderly



- If you have a firearm, keep it securely locked away and safely stored unloaded and uncocked



TYPES OF HEAD INJURIES:

- **Concussion** — Confusion or brief loss of consciousness following a violent blow or other trauma to the head
- **Fracture** — A break or crack in the bony covering of the brain (the skull). Usually indicates a major blow to the head and may include damage to the brain. However, serious brain injuries can occur without the skull being fractured.

SERIOUS EFFECTS OF HEAD INJURIES:

- **Swelling** — Swelling of brain tissue after trauma to the head, causes pressure on the brain
- **Hemorrhage** — Bleeding inside or around the brain, causes pressure on the brain and can compress or directly damage brain tissue
- **Hematoma** — Blood clot that forms within or around the brain, causes pressure on the brain

All head injuries are potentially serious and should be evaluated by a doctor.

SYMPTOMS AFTER HEAD INJURIES:

The following symptoms after a head injury call for immediate medical evaluation:

- Headache
- Disorientation and confusion
- Loss of consciousness
- Loss of memory of events surrounding injury
- Dizziness
- Blurred vision or double vision
- Difficulty swallowing
- Slurred speech
- Nausea
- Vomiting

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- National Head Injury Foundation
1176 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Suite 100
Washington, DC 20036-1904 or
800/444-6443

INFORM YOURSELF:

To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, check out the AMA’s Web site at www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm.

Additional Sources: National Institutes of Health, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (CDC), AMA’s Family Medical Guide, AMA’s Encyclopedia of Medicine, Brain Injury Association

Brian Pace, MA, Writer

Richard M. Glass, MD, Editor

Jeff Molter, Director of Science News

The JAMA Patient Page is a public service of JAMA and the AMA. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances; but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your personal medical condition, JAMA and the AMA suggest that you consult your physician. This page may be reproduced noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with patients. Any other reproduction is subject to AMA approval. To purchase bulk reprints, call 212/354-0050.

