

Thank you for reviewing our draft patient guide. We greatly appreciate your time and insights.

Once we collect all feedback, our writers and designer will edit the guide based on what we hear. This can include making it shorter and easier to read. To see an example of a final guide, please see our recent patient guide for [Low Back Pain](#). (Note: All guides may look different.)

When you're finished reading the draft patient guide, please fill out [this survey](#) by **January 27, 2020**.

Draft—do not cite. Report is a work in progress and could change following public consultation.

QUALITY STANDARDS

Concussion

What to discuss with your health care provider to help you get high-quality care

IMAGE TBD

Draft—do not cite. Report is a work in progress and could change following public consultation.

Ontario Health is committed to helping patients, health care providers, and organizations improve the quality of health care in Ontario.

To do that, Ontario Health, through its Quality business unit (previously Health Quality Ontario), develops quality standards that set out important steps to treat conditions like a concussion. These standards are based on current evidence and input from an expert committee that includes patients, health care professionals, and researchers.

If you're interested in learning more about standards of care for concussions, see page 16 of this guide. It has a summary of the top six areas to improve care for people age 5 years and older with a concussion. You can also download the complete [quality standard here](#).

What is a concussion?

A concussion is a brain injury that can affect your body and mind. All brain injuries are serious health conditions, even though they're not as obvious as a broken arm or leg.

Any impact to your head, face, or neck can cause a concussion, but any force that shakes your brain can cause one, too. Falling, playing sports, or being in an accident can all cause a concussion. With this type of injury, things like headaches, dizziness, and problems seeing or sleeping can affect your daily work, school, or social life. These symptoms can last for days or weeks. Although they usually go away within a month, it can take some people longer to recover.

Use this guide to start conversations with your health care provider about your concussion and your recovery plan. It doesn't tell you everything you need to know about concussions, but it can point you toward the right care. It includes information and questions on:

- Do I have a concussion?
- What to do after a concussion
- Symptoms that aren't getting better
- Living with a concussion
- Helpful resources

If you don't have time to read the whole guide, use this checklist when you talk to your health care provider. The more you talk with them, the more help you can get in your recovery.

"Just receiving that diagnosis and finally getting everything in line, we felt like we were on the road forward."

PERSON WITH A CONCUSSION

Is this an emergency? If you need help right away:

Call 9-1-1 or go to the nearest emergency department

See your primary care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner)

Call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 to get health advice or information

If you're a family member, caregiver, or friend:

This guide can help you support your family member or friend as they manage their concussion. They might have trouble thinking clearly or managing a lot of information, so you can help by offering to go to appointments with them. This guide suggests questions you can ask their family doctor, nurse practitioner, or another health care professional, too.

Learn more

- [Rowan's Law: Concussion Safety](#): Learn how to prevent, identify, and manage concussions. Find out about Rowan's Law Day and other concussion awareness resources
- [Concussions Ontario](#): The Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation shares more information on concussions, along with resources in the province.

Talking about: do I have a concussion?

If you think you have a concussion, see your family doctor or nurse practitioner or go to the emergency department. Some symptoms may not show up right away, or you might not realize that they are serious.

How can I get a diagnosis?

A health care provider will examine you and go over your symptoms to make the right diagnosis. They'll also make sure that a separate issue isn't causing your symptoms.

Medical imaging (for example, an x-ray, CT scan, or MRI) won't show whether you have a concussion, but your doctor or nurse practitioner may use imaging or bloodwork to rule out other conditions.

Tell your doctor or nurse practitioner:

.....
About your physical and emotional symptoms

If you've had a concussion or head injury before

If you had any other health conditions before the injury (for example, sleep problems, migraine, anxiety, or depression). They could play a role in your concussion symptoms

Concussion signs and symptoms

Everyone's concussion experience is different, but common signs and symptoms include:

- Headache or vision problems
- Nausea or vomiting
- Dizziness
- Memory loss
- Trouble thinking clearly or finding words
- Drowsiness or fatigue
- Losing consciousness
- Mood changes (feeling anxious, sad, or bad-tempered)
- Balance problems
- Ringing in the ears
- Light and noise sensitivity
- Sleep problems

Draft—do not cite. Report is a work in progress and could change following public consultation.

Ask your family doctor or nurse practitioner:

What symptoms can I expect?

How long will it take for things to get better?

What should I expect from my recovery journey? Will my symptoms change over time?

Where should I go for concussion care? Who has experience managing concussions?

What happens if I get another concussion?

“When you have a concussion ... your brain doesn’t know when to turn off. It’s always on guard because it’s afraid something’s going to happen again.”

PERSON WITH A CONCUSSION

Write it down

It can help to track your symptoms by writing them down and to take notes during your doctor’s visit. If it’s hard for you to get all the details down, ask a friend or family member to help.

Draft—do not cite. Report is a work in progress and could change following public consultation.

If you're a family member or caregiver, ask:

- What do I need to know about the concussion diagnosis?
- As a parent or guardian of a child, how are concussions different for children?
- How can I support someone with a concussion?
- Who should I contact if I have questions?

Talking about: what to do after a concussion

Getting better after a concussion takes time and care. Symptoms can affect many parts of your life—from the way you think to the way you sleep—and you might have to change some habits for a while. This can help you heal and avoid another injury.

Your family doctor or nurse practitioner should share information about concussions and advise you on the steps back to a regular routine (as long as it doesn't make things worse). Depending on your symptoms, you might need to:

- Take a break from your usual activities for 1 or 2 days
- Take time off work or school
- Set up special accommodations at work or school
- Stay away from computer, television, phone, or tablet screens
- Avoid sports until you have medical clearance to go back

Recovery timelines

Concussions affect everyone in different ways, and recovery timelines can be different, too:

- Most concussion symptoms get better within a month
- Symptoms that last longer than 4 to 6 weeks are called “prolonged post-concussion symptoms”

Getting better after a concussion isn't just about getting over an injury, it's about getting back to your life.

Draft—do not cite. Report is a work in progress and could change following public consultation.

Ask your health care provider:

When can I return to work, school, sports, or any other activity?

Do I need workplace or school accommodations?

What activities can I do safely?

When should I follow up with you?

What can I do to get better faster?

Helpful resources

- [Ontario Brain Injury Association \(OBIA\)](#): Education, awareness, and support for Ontarians living with acquired brain injury. Call their helpline at 1-800-263-5404 (calls are answered Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm EST)

Talking about: concussion symptoms that aren't getting better

Your body has its own schedule for healing. If your symptoms last longer than a month, you could have what's called "prolonged post-concussion symptoms." It might take you extra time to completely recover, but specialized treatment will help.

Pay attention to your symptoms and follow up with your doctor or nurse practitioner if your symptoms aren't getting better. They will go over your condition and refer you to the right health care provider for added care.

Coordinated concussion care

Providers in many areas of health care play a role in concussion care. They'll have specific knowledge and skills that can help you recover.

For example, a physiotherapist can help with neck and spine issues, as well as problems with dizziness or balance. A speech-language pathologist can help with concentration, communication, memory, or attention problems.

This [provider list](#) shares more about the different types of care for ongoing concussion symptoms.

Ask your health care provider:

What should I do if my symptoms are not getting better or I have new symptoms?

What other treatments or referrals can help my symptoms?

Draft—do not cite. Report is a work in progress and could change following public consultation.

What concussion services are available in my area? Which ones are a priority for my kind of injury?

Who will coordinate my care?

What are the long-term consequences of my injury?

Tell your health care provider:

.....
If you are worried about the cost of specialized concussion services

If you need help managing any parts of your care

“You don’t know why you feel the way you do. You don’t have words to describe what’s different or how you’re a different person than you were before. Your whole life looks and feels alien to you.”

PERSON WITH A CONCUSSION

Talking about: life after a concussion

As you recover, your brain is trying to heal and protect itself. There's another side to getting better, too: coping with how the injury has affected your life. You might not be able to do the things you love—even going to a coffee shop can be hard if loud noises bother you. If you can't work, you might be worried about finances. And your relationships may have changed, too. Talk to your health care provider about how you're feeling so you can get the right supports.

Concussion recovery is like a journey. Setting small goals along the way can help balance your need to heal with efforts to get back to your life.

Ask your health care provider:

Where can I find peer support programs in my area?

Who can help me with the emotional side of my injury?

I'm worried about what my concussion could cost me if I can't work or need extra care. What programs can help? (OHIP, group benefits, or other insurance like Employment Insurance)

Children and adolescents: after a concussion

Getting back to a regular routine can be a challenge for children, especially if they still have symptoms. Check with their school, sports organizations, or other groups on supports for their return to school, play, and daily life.

Questions to ask:

- What concussion policies (rules or practices) does the school, sports organization, or community centre follow? (For example, what steps do they take if a student or participant might have a concussion?)
- What accommodations or support (for schoolwork or other activities) are available to help students recovering from a concussion?

Some helpful resources for parents and caregivers:

- [Concussion Awareness Resource E-booklet for ages 10 and under](#): For athletes, students, parents, coaches, officials, or educators
- [Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation resources](#): For parents, teachers, and coaches
- [Concussion Ed app](#): A free mobile app by Parachute Canada, with concussion resources for youth, parents, and educators
- [Concussion Awareness Training Tool \(CATT\)](#): Package for parents and caregivers

“Finding a way to take care of my mental health with self-reflection helped me feel fulfilled when I didn’t have those other pieces of my life.”

PERSON WITH A CONCUSSION

If you're a family member or caregiver, ask:

- How can I support someone who is living with the effects of a concussion?

More resources

- The [Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation](#) (ONF) is a non-profit organization that uses research to create the best care strategies for brain and spinal cord injuries. ONF shares neurotrauma prevention and health practices with patients, health professionals, and health policy makers:
 - [Concussions Ontario](#): Learn more about concussions and find resources (sponsored by the Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation)
 - [Concussion Do's and Don'ts](#): A one-page tip sheet guides you during the first few days after a concussion diagnosis
 - [Concussion Care and Recovery Pathway](#): Helps you navigate care and recovery if you think you may have a concussion
 - [Interview Guide](#): Shares questions to ask providers or at concussion clinics as you talk about your concussion care
- [HEADS UP](#) website by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): This site has resources for parents, youth, coaches, school professionals, and health care providers to help them recognize, respond to, and minimize the risk of concussion and other serious brain injuries
- [Pink Concussions](#): A non-profit organization with focus on pre-injury education and post-injury medical care for women and girls with brain injury from sport, violence, accidents, or military service
- [EMPWR Foundation](#): A charitable organization created to advance the recovery of concussion injuries. Resources include a podcast and toolkits for post-concussion exercise progression and return to normal activity

For your reference: The quality standard in brief

This patient guide accompanies the quality standard on concussion care.

Below is a summary of the top six areas to improve care for people age 5 years and older with a concussion. To read more, you can download the [quality standard here](#).

Quality Statement 1: Diagnosis of Concussion

People suspected to have a concussion are diagnosed in a timely manner via a comprehensive assessment. The assessment includes taking a history, examining concussion symptoms, and reviewing physical and mental health comorbidities.

Quality Statement 2: Education, Self-Management, and Support for Patients, Families, and Caregivers

People with a concussion, and their families and caregivers, are provided with early education, resources, reassurance, and support for concussion care.

Quality Statement 3: Acute Management of Concussion

People with a concussion are counselled to participate in symptom-guided physical and cognitive activity, rather than resting completely after the injury. They are advised to gradually become more active, as tolerated, and to monitor the number and severity of their symptoms.

Quality Statement 4: Follow-up and Management of Persistent or Prolonged Post-Concussion Symptoms

People suspected to have persistent or prolonged post-concussion symptoms receive medical follow-up for reassessment, diagnosis, and management that is guided by their individual clinical presentation.

Draft—do not cite. Report is a work in progress and could change following public consultation.

Quality Statement 5: Timely Access to Specialized, Interprofessional Concussion Care

People with a concussion who have symptoms for more than 4 weeks, comorbidities, or identified risk factors, and whose symptoms are not improving, have timely access to specialized, interprofessional concussion care for coordinated management of their overall symptoms.

Quality Statement 6: Education and Training for Health Care Providers

Health care providers who deliver care and services for people with a suspected concussion are educated and trained about the risk factors, symptoms, assessment, and management of acute concussion and persistent or prolonged post-concussion symptoms.

Draft—do not cite. Report is a work in progress and could change following public consultation.

What's next?

Remember, everybody is different.

The support you need and the transition plan you develop with your care providers will be unique to you.

This conversation guide is only a starting point.

You may have other topics you want to cover with your care professionals. It's important to speak to them about any other questions or concerns.

Need more information?

If you have any questions or feedback about this guide, please contact us at qualitystandards@hqontario.ca or 1-866-623-6868.

For more reading on concussion care, read the quality standard at:

hqontario.ca/qualitystandards

ISBN TBA (Print)

ISBN TBA (PDF)

© Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2020