

Head Injuries in Children Ages 0-18

While visiting a friend during medical school who had already braved the world of parenthood, I watched his lovely little baby observe her surroundings from her seated spot on the thickly carpeted floor. When the little one lost her balance and slowly fell back onto her head, we heard a soft thunk - to which my friend cheekily commented, "Well, there goes law school!"

We laughed at the time, but head injuries in children have to be one of the most upsetting situations for parents, which makes our job of assessing and accurately treating head injured children even more important.

We all recognize that children who remain unconscious; have signs of bleeding (from ears or nose); or who have a focal neurological deficit should be sent to the ER immediately - by ambulance.

For head injuries that occur in children older than two years due to falls from a standing height or sports-related head injuries, a head CT scan is NOT required if they have the following signs:

- Awake, talking, and walking;
- Less than two episodes of vomiting;
- Mild headache, and
- A normal neurological response.

This is the case EVEN WITH a history of a transient loss of consciousness. Feel confident to monitor these kids in the community. If there is a neurological change or recurrent episodes of vomiting, then refer to the ER. It's helpful to know that 95% of epidural bleeding will happen less than 4 hours from the time of injury.

Here are some helpful resources for managing head injuries in children:

- For evidence-based algorithms for ordering a head CT in children under AND over two years of age, visit: <http://californiaacep.org/improving-health/pecarn/>
- A handy resource for parents on head injury basics can be found at: http://www.bcchildrens.ca/Resource-Centre-site/Documents/D-E/BCCH1001_HeadInjury_2014.pdf
- For a GREAT one-page reference on Return to Play AND Learning, see: <http://www.saferhockey.com/pdf/Generic%20Concussion%20Management.pdf>
- Parachute Canada is another very good resource for injury prevention information: www.parachutecanada.org