

# CONCUSSIONS:

Top Tips for Recovery







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# How Families Can Deal with a Concussion

## A Mom and Son Share Their Experiences

Rosalie Kolstad was in the time box at the hockey rink, writing up the goal her son, Ash Kolstad, had just scored during his team tryout, when he got hit.

“I looked up and realized (Ash) was down,” says Rosalie, who was working at the time as a graduate program coordinator at the University of Calgary’s Faculty of Kinesiology. “Afterward, we went to an urgent care facility. We were told he had a low-grade concussion.”

That was the beginning of a long and arduous road to recovery that put the Calgary family under enormous pressure. Ash, who was then 12 years old, subsequently suffered a second concussion from another bodycheck, just weeks after the first.



While Ash has made great strides to recovery in the past seven years, he and his mom want to share their hard-won wisdom about concussions with other parents and children.

“He was constantly in pain,” Rosalie says. “He could not tolerate light or sound. He could not focus. He was dizzy and would fall. He was nauseous and had no appetite. He would go days without sleeping and then crash.”

Here is the Kolstads’ personal advice for families dealing with the aftermath of concussion, with the caveat that not every family’s experience will be the same.

## Ash Kolstad’s 5 Tips for Someone with a Concussion

- 1 Rest.** Rest is most important to ensure that the concussion fully and properly heals. Rest needs to be a priority before returning back to play. (I went back to play hockey again after the first concussion too soon). One game or practice isn’t worth being affected by symptoms your whole life.
- 2 Understand.** Understand that the road to full recovery may not be a quick and simple fix. It may take a while, with lots of bumps and obstacles along the way.
- 3 You know how you feel.** Some people around you may think that you’re seeking attention or faking it. This is because those people don’t understand what you’re going through and have never felt what you feel. They are forming opinions because the damage you suffered is invisible to them; unless you received another injury, you are likely not wearing a cast or brace. Realize that you understand yourself and what you’re feeling better than anyone else.
- 4 Talk.** Talk about your feelings to a medical professional and to an understanding family member. Share what you’re feeling and thinking, so that you don’t feel without support and lonely.



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**5 Never lose hope!** This may be the most important advice I can offer. There may be treatments that don't work when you think they will. There may be days where you break down and feel like nothing will ever change. This is very discouraging, but concussions have become a very popular field of research. Stay hopeful. Things will get better.



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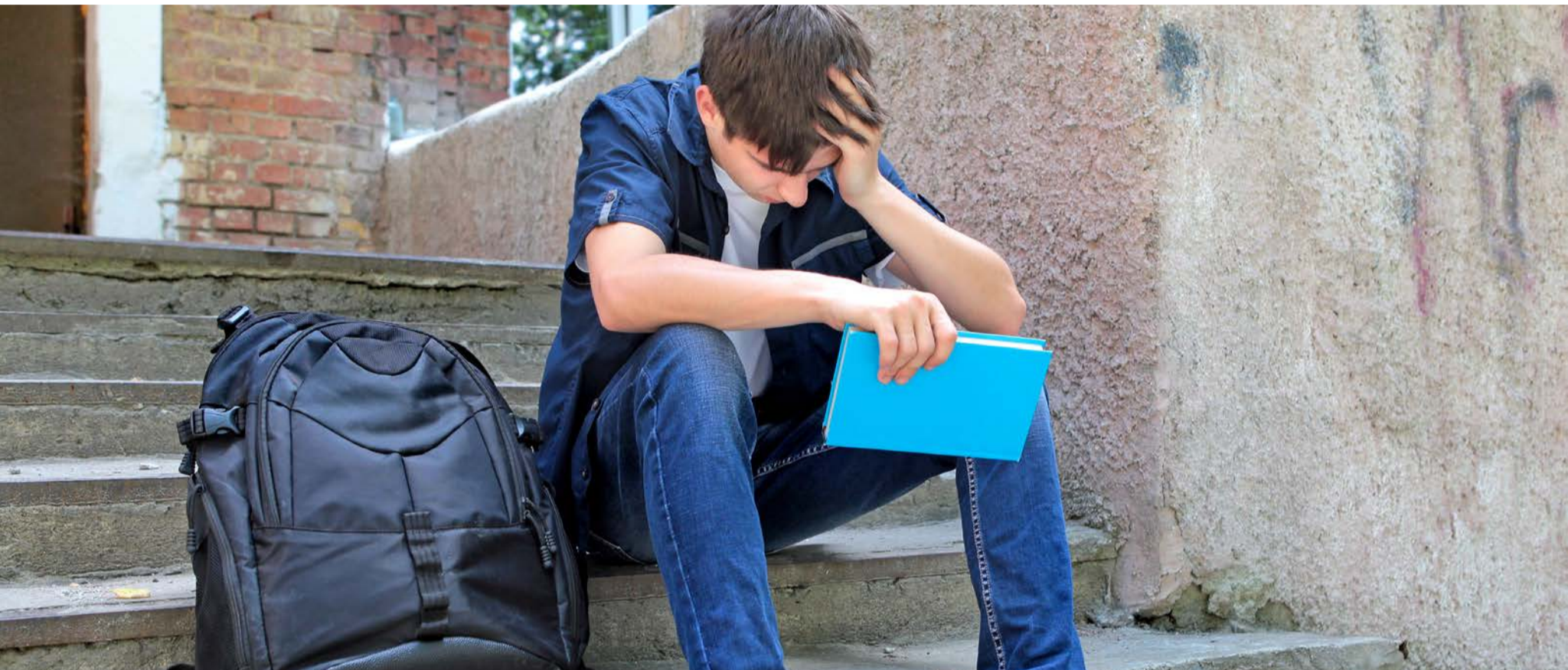
**There may be days where you break down and feel like nothing will ever change. This is very discouraging, but concussions have become a very popular field of research. Stay hopeful. Things will get better.**

## Rosalie Kolstad's 5 Key Messages for Parents

- 1 Take your child's symptoms seriously.** Do not tell them to suck it up. They are not faking. You are your child's support network and advocate. They need you on their side.
- 2 Make sure your child rests.** That means taking a break from sports, video games, even school. Do not rush them back. They will not miss out. They must have complete mental rest. If you let them return too quickly, it will delay their recovery. Even worse, you could be as unlucky as we were and they may reinjure themselves.
- 3 If the doctor you see does not administer concussion testing,** I believe they do not have the correct expertise to assess and treat your child. Go to another doctor or ask for a referral to a sport medicine doctor.  
  
Look for a research study to join — this is the fastest access to top experts. Find a physiotherapist that specializes in head and neck and book an appointment as soon as possible.  
  
[Here is an example of a trial](#) that has been led by Dr. Karen Barlow, associate professor of pediatrics and clinical neurosciences and Deborah Dewey, professor of pediatrics at the Cumming School of Medicine. The Play Game trial is part of the Childhood Traumatic Brain Injury Research Program, Alberta Children's Hospital Research Institute, University of Calgary. The trial will run until approximately November, 2019.
- 4 Keep a logbook and document everything.** This includes logging symptoms, appointments and activity. If things do not improve, this will be essential to your child's recovery.
- 5 Concussions affect every person differently.** Symptoms could be subtle to severe. Be supportive.



# Does Your Child Have a Concussion?



Children can at times display behaviour and physical signs that are typical of concussion or mild traumatic brain injury (TBI). An assessment by a physician is usually the best first step to determining if your child needs treatment consistent with these kinds of injuries.

Alberta Health Services and the [Alberta Children's Hospital Traumatic Brain Injury Research Program, University of Calgary](#), provide comprehensive information for parents to consider and act upon. (See page 9).

## What is a Concussion or Mild Traumatic Brain Injury?

There is a close relation between the terms concussion and mild traumatic brain injury (TBI).

These kinds of injuries can be caused by a direct hit to the head, face or neck.

Common causes among children can include sports-related injuries, falls and motor vehicle collisions.

A hit to the body that carries force to the head can also cause injury, as the brain moves quickly within the skull. A simple hit to the head without any neurological symptoms is not a concussion.

## What are Common Symptoms?

- Headache, dizziness, nausea and/or vomiting
- Trouble paying attention or remembering
- Feeling depressed or down or being irritable
- Having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
- Not everyone loses consciousness after a concussion or mild TBI

These symptoms usually last seven to 10 days, with about three out of four children fully recovering one month after the injury. If your child has had a concussion or mild TBI before or has migraines, it may take longer to recover.

Talk to your healthcare provider with a follow-up when symptoms last longer than four weeks.

Depending on your location, your child may benefit from a referral to an appropriate clinic that specializes in concussion.



In Alberta, there is the Alberta Children’s Hospital (ACH) Concussion Clinic. The Calgary Childhood Complex Concussion Clinic is part of both the University of Calgary’s Traumatic Brain Injury Research Program, and the Brain Injury and Rehabilitation Program at ACH.

## **How is it Treated?**

The most important treatment for a concussion or mild TBI is rest. This means no school or physical activity for the first one to two days – and to prevent another concussion.

You can start a “step-wise” increase in your child’s activities if they seem to be doing okay after two days of rest.

# Steps to Recover

<b>REST</b>	<b>RETURN TO LEARN</b>	<b>RETURN TO PLAY</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rest for one or two days</li><li>• Can walk and/or do light exercise (no sweating) as tolerated</li><li>• Limit computer time, video games, texting and light reading</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Step 1:</b> Restricted activities</li><li><b>Step 2:</b> Back to school with modified activities</li><li><b>Step 3:</b> Nearly normal routine</li><li><b>Step 4:</b> Back to school full time</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Step 1:</b> Restricted activities</li><li><b>Step 2:</b> Light aerobic exercise</li><li><b>Step 3:</b> Sport-specific training and exercises</li><li><b>Step 4:</b> No-contact drills</li><li><b>Step 5:</b> Healthcare provider says child can return to contact sports</li></ul>

Source: Alberta Children's Hospital Traumatic Brain Injury Program. [Find more information here.](#)

## Online resources

- [Parachute](#) is a national charitable organization aimed at preventing injuries and saving lives. Here you'll find everything from Concussion Q & As to a Sport Concussion Assessment Tool.
- [Traumatic Brain Injury Research Program at Alberta Children's Hospital](#) provides clinical and research programs.
- [Sport Injury Prevention Research Centre](#)
- [Research Findings for Concussion](#)
- [Acute Sport Concussion Clinic](#)
- Making Headway in Soccer: [Concussion Resources](#)