

# WORKPLACE CONCUSSIONS: IDENTIFY, RESPOND AND PREVENT



Concussions can happen to anyone, not just athletes. Employees working at heights, researchers in laboratories, and theater arts students performing onstage or behind the scenes may be exposed to risks of head injury. **Immediate medical attention is required after any head injury.**

## WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a type of mild traumatic brain injury—or TBI—caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head, or a hit to the body that causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth. This sudden movement can cause the brain to bounce around or twist in the skull, creating chemical changes in the brain and sometimes stretching and damaging brain cells. The most common causes of workplace brain injuries are falls, being struck by or against an object, and motor vehicle collisions.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

A concussion may or may not involve a loss of consciousness. You do *not* have to black out or be knocked out to experience a concussion.

### SOME COMMON DANGER SIGNS\* AND SYMPTOMS INCLUDE:

- Drowsiness\*
- Different sized pupils\*
- Convulsions or seizures\*
- Trouble recognizing people or places\*
- Confusion, restlessness or agitation\*
- Unusual behavior
- Loss of consciousness
- Headache (or sense of pressure in your head)
- Nausea or vomiting
- Dizziness
- Seeing stars or lights
- Blurred or double vision
- Slurred speech
- Balance problems
- Sensitivity to light and/or noise

Symptoms may not appear right away and may not be noticed for days or months after the injury. It is important to monitor the person for symptoms following a head injury.

In rare cases, a dangerous blood clot that crowds the brain against the skull can develop.



[www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury](http://www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury)

## RESPONDING TO A POSSIBLE CONCUSSION

**Immediate medical attention is required after any head injury.** Even if the person shows no symptoms or any of the danger signs (see box), they must:

- **Stop work**
- **Tell their supervisor**
- **Get immediate medical attention**

Supervisors must ensure that employees know that head injuries can be very serious and require immediate medical attention. Supervisors need to submit an Online Accident Reporting System ([OARS report](#)) within 24 hours of the incident.

Employees recovering from a concussion must follow their medical provider's instructions. Restrictions may include avoiding activities that are mentally and/or physically demanding, driving and operating heavy machinery.

## HOW CAN CONCUSSIONS BE PREVENTED?

Supervisors, building managers and employees can help to reduce the risk of falls, falling objects, and bumps to the head, and ensure that proper personal protective equipment (PPE) is available and used.

- **Remove tripping hazards.** Make sure walkways and work spaces are free of clutter, cords, puddles of liquid, or anything else that can cause a slip, trip or fall.
- **Regularly conduct inspections** relevant to the workplace, including the [Walking, Working Surfaces Inspection Checklist](#).
- **Use signage** to alert employees of:
  - Wet or slippery surfaces
  - Low overhangs/overhead clearance
  - Secured temporary floor covers
- **Wear safety footwear** to prevent falls if you work in slippery or rough areas.
- **Clean and organize** shelves, storage areas and work spaces to avoid falling objects.
- **Do not stand** on chairs, desks or tables; use a foldable ladder-type step stool instead.
- In storage areas, **do not climb on shelves**; place the heaviest objects on the floor or the lowest possible shelving.
- **Use ladders** to properly access or retrieve materials in high places.
- **Use caution when working at heights.** Know how to use fall protection and fall restraint equipment.
- **Ensure proper fit and condition** of hard hats and other PPE.
- **Always drive safely** and wear seat belt.



Theater lighting catwalk guardrail system  
[UC Performing Arts Safety Manual](#)



Arborist wearing hard hat  
[www.thisoldhouse.com](http://www.thisoldhouse.com)



Guardrail system on overpass by E18 parking lot

## RESOURCES

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) Traumatic Brain Injury & Concussions](#)  
[CDC Heads Up to Brain Injury Awareness](#)  
[Walking, Working Surfaces Inspection Checklist](#)  
[UW Fall Protection Program Manual](#)  
[Ladder Safety Focus Sheet](#)

Contact EH&S at 206.685.1026 or [emphlth@uw.edu](mailto:emphlth@uw.edu) with medical questions about concussions.  
Contact EH&S at 206.543.7388 or [ehsdept@uw.edu](mailto:ehsdept@uw.edu) with questions about fall protection and PPE.