

## Wake Up —a Reasonable Return to Riding

Recovery and management of concussion should follow physicians' instructions. The following are recommendations for "return to play" in equestrian sports.

*How long should the rider wait before riding again after a concussion?\**

- **Green Light** – same day, only if no Key Signs or Symptoms *after* waiting 15 minutes
- **Yellow Light** – 5-7 days *after* there are no Key Signs/Symptoms both at rest and during exertion, *and* being medically cleared by physician. Loss of consciousness or more serious concussion may require two weeks or more free of Key Signs or Symptoms.
- **Red Light** — After multiple concussions, it may be necessary for the rider to discontinue the sport for the season. In rare occasions, the rider may need to reconsider the sport.

Remember, all concussions count – it doesn't matter if traumas to the head are caused by falls from horses, car accidents, other sports related injuries such as skiing or soccer, whiplash, or falls against a hard surface like the floor, a rock or a tree.

\* Personal medical history or other conditions may indicate a longer waiting period.

For more information about the management of concussion in sport, contact or log on to:

- Brain Injury Association  
(800) 444-6442
- [www.headinjury.com](http://www.headinjury.com)
- [brain@headinjury.com](mailto:brain@headinjury.com)
- Centers for Disease Control  
[www.cdc.gov/ncip/tbi](http://www.cdc.gov/ncip/tbi)
- USEA Safety Committee  
[concussion@equestriansafety.com](mailto:concussion@equestriansafety.com).



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American Medical Equestrian Association-Safe Riders Foundation  
[www.ameaonline.org](http://www.ameaonline.org)

United States Eventing Association  
[www.eventingusa.org](http://www.eventingusa.org)

United States Equestrian Federation  
[www.usef.org](http://www.usef.org)

## Wake Up to Concussion!



Photo courtesy of Patricia Maykuth

This brochure is to help people in the horse sports to recognize concussion in the field so that medical assessment and management can be pursued.

Each rider is different and has an individual medical history. The information presented here should be used for guidelines. Diagnosis can be made only by medical professionals.

**Wake Up to Concussion**

**It's no joke.**

# Wake UP



## to CONCUSSION

The most common head injury in sport is concussion. Riding of any kind – not just jumping, ranks third in the number of concussions sustained by adults. This brochure is designed to help riders recognize mild concussion in the field so that appropriate medical assessment and management can follow.

Be Smart! Ride Safe.™

## What is Concussion?

**Concussion** is a brain injury caused by trauma to the head. 95% of people who experience concussion do NOT have any loss of consciousness.

## Why Should I Care?

**Riding** is a contact sport - just like football, soccer, skiing or boxing. Every rider may someday fall off and hit their head on the ground or another hard object. No matter how good or experienced the rider, no matter how gentle the horse, no matter how safe the environment, anyone can hit their head due to a fall off their horse. **Even you.**



Pinehurst Gazette photo

Chances are you'll never need to know about concussions. Just in case you or someone you train, judge or watch falls off a horse and hits their head, here are some answers to commonly asked questions about concussions, so that appropriate medical assessment and management can follow—

## What are some Key Signs and Symptoms of Concussion?

- Feeling like “you had your bell rung” or getting “dinged” or “seeing stars”
- Not knowing what happened (little or no memory just before and/or just after a fall)
- Headache
- Loss of balance and/or equilibrium
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Fuzzy and/or blurry vision
- Poor concentration or inability to carry out a set of simple instructions
- Drowsiness and/or fatigue
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Poor memory or forgetfulness about “routine” things like “losing” your keys
- Irritability or unusual aggressiveness

**Almost all mild concussions occur without any loss of consciousness.**

## What Should I Do?

**Ask** a rider immediately after s/he hits their head due to a fall, *even if* they do not appear to look symptomatic – dizzy, confused, out of balance, etc.:

- What day is it?
- What is the name of the competition?
- In what place or town is the competition located?
- What was your start time?
- What number is your next fence?

## Know your Green/Red/Yellow Lights.

*What if the rider answers all the questions correctly and has none of the Key Signs or Symptoms?*

### GREEN LIGHT

- Rider can immediately continue with the course.

*What if the rider misses questions or appears confused?*

### YELLOW LIGHT

- Rider ought to stop and be observed for 15 minutes.

*What if the rider answers all the questions correctly and has no Key Signs or Symptoms after 15 minutes?*

### GREEN LIGHT

- Rider can continue on course and can ride additional horse(s) in the competition.

*What if one or more Key Signs or Symptoms persist after 15 minutes?*

### RED LIGHT

- Rider's competing day is over.
- Rider should not be left alone at the barn, and...
- Should consult a physician for evaluation at their earliest convenience

**WHAT IF THERE IS ANY LOSS OF CONSCIOUSNESS, even for a few seconds?**

### RED LIGHT

- Transport to medical facility for evaluation.

## Wake UP

### to Second Impact

During the recovery period from concussion, people are at risk for other types of additional accident or injury. In a fit, healthy person, a second trauma to an already injured head that has not yet completely healed may have disproportional consequences. It **does not matter** how mild a second hit nor does it matter what causes a second trauma, hit, snap or jerk to the head. It could be as simple as friendly slap on the back or being rear-ended in a traffic accident.

It is **essential** that the brain be given adequate time to “heal” from **any** concussion. The concussion, the head trauma, is what matters, not the fall from a horse, the traffic accident, another sports-related injury such as skiing, soccer, etc.

There are serious risks if the brain is not allowed to completely heal from a concussion. **Second Impact can be catastrophic. Second Impact is no joke.**

*Protect yourself from repeated head injury before the original concussion has healed. Do not ride or participate in any other sport until all symptoms of a first concussion are totally and completely resolved.*

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**Never “tough it out” after a concussion!**