



Boys and girls' concussion symptoms can differ

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A study on concussions in high school athletes finds that girls describe them differently than boys, which could mean that some parents and coaches miss the brain injury's signs.

The study, presented this week at the National Athletic Trainers' Association Youth Sports Safety Summit in Washington, D.C., looked at 812 sports-related concussions suffered by 610 male and 202 female high school athletes over two years.

The researchers found that while headaches were the most frequently reported symptom of concussions in both girls and boys, secondary symptoms tended to differ between the sexes.

About half of boys, for example, reported being confused or disoriented after a head injury. Yet only a little more than a third of girls reported being confused.

As well, more than twice as many boys as girls reported having amnesia as part of a concussion.

Girls, on the other hand, were three times more likely to report being sensitive to noise after being hit in the head. And almost one in three girls reported feeling drowsy, compared to just one in five boys.

Study co-author R. Dawn Comstock, an associate professor at the Ohio State University College of Medicine, notes that diagnosing concussions is a tricky matter that's based mostly on evaluating symptoms.

"No biological markers exist to detect concussion, so diagnosis largely depends on a patient's own report," she said in a news release.

"Diagnosing concussion is further complicated by the tendency of many athletes to under-report or hide symptoms from their doctors, athletic trainers, coaches and parents."

Even with the differences in symptoms between the genders, the time needed for the athletes to recover before returning to play did not differ, the report noted.

"Physicians, athletic trainers, coaches and parents should understand that each symptom of a possible concussion must be evaluated, monitored and fully resolved, before an athlete returns to play," said Comstock.

While boys tend to participate in sports at a higher rate than girls, female athletes are more likely than male athletes to suffer sport-related concussions. And as more girls and young women participate in rough-and-tumble sports, understanding possible differences in concussion symptoms between the two genders has become increasingly important, Comstock said.

The study will be published in the January 2011 issue of the *Journal of Athletic Training*.

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