



## Fraser Valley Brain Injury Association

# Concussion Program



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## Guidelines for Concussion Clinic Services

- Participants must not be eligible for Fraser Health's Concussion Clinic.
- Must be at least 6 months of recovery if over the age of 18

Please note: Participation in the Fraser Valley Brain Injury Association's Concussion program does not constitute eligibility for any other programs offered by Fraser Valley Brain Injury Association.

## Fraser Valley Brain Injury Association Program Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible for the broader range of services from Fraser Valley Brain Injury Association, individuals must have **proof of a diagnosis of an acquired brain injury\***.

This must be confirmed by a physician **and** through **medical and/or rehabilitation documentation\***.

Additional eligibility criteria include:

- Residency and citizenship requirements
- Currently living within the boundaries of Fraser Valley Brain Injury Association (Langley to Boston Bar)
- Limited or no funding from other sources (i.e. ICBC rehabilitation, ICBC settlement, Worker's Compensation Board, Crime Victim Assistance Program, Long or Short Term Disability Programs)

### \* **Proof of Acquired Brain Injury:**

- CT Scan, Neurologist Report, Psychiatrist Report, or MRI Report.

### \* **Medical and Rehabilitation documentation includes the following:**

- Psychiatric reports with DSM IV diagnosis of acquired brain injury
- Neuropsychological assessments clearly indicating acquired brain injury
- Hospital records clearly indicating acquired brain injury
- Medical/Rehabilitation or Hospital discharge reports clearly indicating acquired brain injury.



## What is a Concussion?

A Concussion is an injury to the brain, which can be caused by a sudden acceleration to the head and neck. The WHO diagnostic criteria for a concussion states a jolt or direct hit to the head with one or more of the following symptoms; Amnesia lasting 24 hours or less, loss of consciousness for 30 minutes or less, Glasgow coma scale (13- 15/15) or dazed and confused (at the time of the injury). Symptoms can appear immediately or in some cases, days following the initial injury.

Concussions can occur from various activities including falls, sports, motor vehicle collisions or being struck by an object.

The majority of individuals that sustain a concussion begin to feel better and have symptoms alleviate within a few days to weeks. There are however, a small percentage of the population whose symptoms can persist for months or longer. This is called Post-Concussion Syndrome (PCS)

### Possible Concussion Symptoms

The following are examples of symptoms you may experience. Note that no two concussions are alike and you may experience all or some of the symptoms listed.

Physical	Behavioral/Emotional	Cognitive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headache</li> <li>• Nausea</li> <li>• Vomiting</li> <li>• Blurred/Double Vision</li> <li>• Seeing “Stars” or Lights</li> <li>• Balance Problems</li> <li>• Dizziness</li> <li>• Sensitivity to Light</li> <li>• Tinnitus (ringing in the ears)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drowsiness</li> <li>• Fatigue/Lethargy</li> <li>• Irritability</li> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Sleep more than usual</li> <li>• Difficulty falling asleep</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling slowed down</li> <li>• Feeling in a fog or dazed</li> <li>• Difficulty concentrating</li> <li>• Difficulty remembering</li> </ul>



## How to Manage a Concussion

For the first 24-48 hours after injury, it is recommended that another adult monitor for any of the warning signs or symptoms listed above.

Additionally, it is recommended that you:

- Avoid strenuous physical (e.g. return to sports) and mental activity (e.g. texting, spending time on the computer, reading) for the first few days after injury
- Talk to your doctor about taking acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol) for pain relief of headaches
- Do not drive until your doctor says it is safe to do so
- Do not drink alcohol, take sleeping pills or recreational drugs

There are many reasons not to use alcohol or recreational drugs, including marijuana after a concussion. If you use alcohol or drugs, you run the risk of:

- Hindering your recovery, slowing it down or preventing it to fully heal
- Increased problems with concentration, memory problems or balance
- Increased risk of seizures
- Increased risk of sustaining another concussion.

Common symptoms usually resolve in several weeks to 3 months. The following may assist in your recovery:

- Ensuring you get a proper sleep and physical and mental rest
- Do not drive or operate machinery until your concentration improves
- Do not drink alcohol or take drugs
- Use only medication prescribed by your doctor
- If you have problems at work or school, speak to your doctor, employer or teacher(s) to let them know; you may need to gradually return to school or work
- Talk to your doctor to develop a plan to gradually increase activity (e.g. work, school, exercise, sports)
- Talk to your doctor if you are having difficulty coping or your mood is affecting your relationships

Source: *Guidelines for Concussion/Mild Traumatic Brain Injury & Persistent Symptoms, Second Edition, For Adults (18+ years of age) - Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation [www.onf.org](http://www.onf.org)*



## Sleep issues after concussion

A concussion can change how well you sleep.

You might find that it is hard to get a good night's sleep. You might have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. Sleeping for too long during the day might be a problem.

Other factors such as pain, worrying, medications, mood or other medical conditions can also affect sleep.

It is important to try and get a good night's sleep after a concussion. Sleep helps the brain recover and helps you feel well when you wake up. A good routine for sleep, or what is called Sleep Hygiene, can be very helpful.

### Tips for good sleep hygiene

#### Regular Sleep Routine

- Keep the same bedtime schedule, even on the weekends. Make sure you go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day. Set an alarm if you need to.
- If you don't fall asleep in 30 minutes, get out of bed and do something relaxing. Go back to bed when you feel sleepy. Lying in bed and worrying about not sleeping will usually only make you feel more anxious, and make it harder to fall asleep.
- In the first few days after a concussion, physical rest is important. After the first few days after your concussion, try not to nap during the day. Napping will make it harder to sleep at night. If you are tired, try to stay up, and go to bed earlier if you need to.
- If you need to nap, then take only one nap a day. Try to keep naps short (about 20-30 minutes). Make sure you take a nap before 3 p.m. otherwise you may have trouble falling asleep at night.
- Do something relaxing before you go to bed. Sometimes a warm bath or reading a book can help you go to sleep. You can also listen to soothing music or try deep breathing exercises to relax your body.



## Food, Activities, and Lifestyle

- Do not drink caffeine or alcohol or eat heavy meals 4-6 hours before bedtime. It can make it hard to fall asleep or wake you up in the middle of the night. Eating a small bedtime snack with protein before you go to bed can help.
- Make sure you have enough vitamins and minerals (magnesium, iron, and B vitamins) in your diet.
- Get enough natural light during the day.
- Try to exercise 30-60 minutes a day if you feel well enough. Do not exercise right before bedtime. Talk to your doctor or health care provider before starting to exercise.

## Sleep Environment

- Keep the bedroom dark, quiet, cool, and comfortable.
- If sounds keep you awake, try wearing ear plugs. A white noise machine or fan can also help. Neutral or natural sounds can be helpful to block out distracting sounds.
- Make sure you keep electronics out of the bedroom. Watching TV and using a cell phone or laptop computer can make it hard to fall asleep, because the lights make the brain work harder. Also you don't want to be woken up by calls, texts or other notifications when you are trying to sleep.



**Talk to your doctor or health care provider if your sleep problems or feelings of tiredness do not get better. Do not drive or use machinery if you feel sleepy during the day.**

**Source: *Mild Traumatic Brain Injury/ Concussion: Your Guide to Recovery*  
Sunnybrook Health and Sciences. <https://sunnybrook.ca>**



## Post-Concussion Communication Issues

### Some symptoms of post-concussion issues include:

- Having to ask for things to be repeated
- Confusion, “blanking out” when told new information or asked a question
- Difficulty making choices/decisions
- Slow at processing verbal or written information; slow at doing tasks
- Forgetting the topic of a conversation from one moment to the next.
- Difficulty keeping up with conversation: always behind, quickly exhausted
- Difficulty with nuance, gestures, facial expression, body language
- Stopping mid-sentence
- Slurred speech, slow speech, stammering, monotone
- Unable to focus on conversation with ambient noise, other conversations
- Reading: weak concentration and stamina, difficulty absorbing information.

### If you are having trouble with communication

Have a few lines ready to use in conversation to fit your difficulties:

- “Can you please slow down?”
- “Can you please give me a minute to think about that?”
- “I can’t get an answer for you right now.”
- “Can I get back to you on this?”
- “Can you please text or email me that question so I can find the answer for you?”



## Rehabilitation

If your symptoms are not improving 3 months after the injury, your family doctor may suggest you see a specialist. There are very few specialists or programs that specialize in concussions and post-concussive symptoms. Waiting lists for services covered by Fraser Health are usually long.

As a result, more and more businesses (such as health and sports clinics) are offering treatments. Before you choose a clinic (or physician, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, etc.), it is a good idea to select a few and contact them.

Don't be afraid or embarrassed to ask questions. You need to feel fully informed about their services and understand their expertise in treating those with post-concussive symptoms.

### What questions should I ask a clinic before I choose it for rehabilitation?

Here are some good questions to ask:

- What experience do you have in treating concussions?
- How many people with post-concussion symptoms has your clinic seen?
- Do you have information on how many former patients have been able to return to work or school?
- What professional staff does the clinic have and what are their roles? (e.g., physician, occupational therapist, social worker, neuropsychologist/psychologist, etc.)
- What does an assessment session include?
- What treatments do you usually recommend for post-concussion symptoms?
- How will information be communicated with my doctor or others involved in my care?

*Note: Beware of clinics that offer a "quick fix". Remember, recovery takes time.*

### I am looking for care for my child. Is there anything I should know?

If you are looking for services for children and youth, ask the questions above, but also ask:

- What experience do you have working with children?
- What is your experience with the school system?
- Do you speak with the school and get involved in the return to school plan?
- Which Return to Play or Return to School guides do you use?
- Please describe what treatments typically include?



## Is there anything else to think about when choosing a rehabilitation clinic?

If possible, make a visit to the clinic before deciding. If you can't go in person, send a family member or close friend. Staff should be friendly, approachable and knowledgeable and the clinic space should be clean.

There are a few other questions you might want to ask:

- What is the cost? What are the methods of payment? Is it covered by MSP? (If you are working with ICBC or WorkSafe BC, will the clinic submit a treatment plan directly to the 3rd party insurer?)
- What is the wait time from date of referral to first visit?
- Where is the clinic located? (Consider the distance from your home and how will you get there.)
- What are the clinic hours?
- What is the cancellation/missed appointment policy?
- Is the clinic entrance accessible?

## Local concussion clinics

- SportMedBc [www.sportmedbc.com](http://www.sportmedbc.com)
- Peak Valley Active Health [www.peakvalleyhealth.ca](http://www.peakvalleyhealth.ca)
- Fraser Health Concussion Clinic [www.fraserhealth.ca](http://www.fraserhealth.ca)

The Concussion Clinic is an early intervention and follow-up service for clients living with the effects of a recent concussion/mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI).

*Eligibility: Anyone aged 16 years and over, who has experienced a concussion within the last six months, and resides within the Fraser Health area.*

- Adolescent Complex Concussion Clinic. Vancouver Coastal Health [www.vch.ca](http://www.vch.ca)

If the concussion was sustained in a motor vehicle accident, contact your insurance provider within 7 days and considering contacting a personal injury lawyer with experience with traumatic brain injuries (TBI) immediately.

Brain injury can be quite different from other types of injury. An individual with a brain injury can look the same as before, but the impact of the injury on thinking and emotions can be quite serious. Many lawyers specialize in personal injury; however, a solid understanding of the consequences of brain injury is essential to effectively managing this type of claim. Included with this package is a list of questions that are important to ask when interviewing potential lawyers, including their expertise and experience.



## What to Ask When Interviewing a Lawyer

1. How many brain injury cases has the lawyer handled?
2. If a child is involved, how many cases involving children from infants up to 18 have they dealt with? It is very important to have a lawyer that has a lot of experience working with children.
3. Ask for the name of at least three families/clients for you to talk to.
4. Many of the very good lawyers have extremely competent and experienced legal assistants and you should ask at the beginning if that particular lawyer uses legal assistants at all times and ask to meet them as well.
5. Ask for the court registry number of any cases where that lawyer may have been involved in where there has been a judgment.
6. How does that lawyer work with ICBC?
7. Does that lawyer ever act as a defense lawyer for ICBC?
8. What are the names of the experts usually used by that lawyer for neuropsychology, neurology and vocational?
9. What is the fee structure?
  - (a) What is the percentage charged on a contingency basis?
  - (b) What is that lawyer's practice when it comes to disbursements? (Disbursements are those expenses which have to be incurred in a lawsuit such as: investigation reports, specialists to do independent medical examinations, neuropsychologists, different doctors and so on. Each of these reports will cost many thousands of dollars.)
  - (c) Does the lawyer charge interest if they advance the disbursements?
  - (d) Does the lawyer expect the family/client to cover the cost of the disbursements as incurred?
10. Be well organized when you go to meet a lawyer. Bring this sheet with you and paper to write the response down on. There is absolutely no harm in making sure that the lawyer knows that you are checking out other lawyers as well.
11. Meet with at least three different lawyers before deciding. Meet with more if you are not happy with the three initial lawyers that you met with.
12. When interviewing the lawyer, remember that this is likely to be a long term relationship until the case settles or goes to court, so you must be very comfortable with that lawyer. Again, a reminder, interview at least three different lawyers.



## Concussions in Children

Concussions are especially dangerous in young children because they may not be able to tell you how they're feeling. You'll need to watch them carefully for any signs and symptoms.

To make things even more confusing, sometimes concussion symptoms don't show up right away after an injury. The signs and symptoms may appear hours or even days after the injury.

The signs of a concussion are generally the same for any age. But for babies, toddlers, and older children, you may have to think a little differently when trying to determine if they have a concussion.

### Signs of a concussion in babies

In young babies, signs of a concussion can include:

- crying when you move the baby's head
- irritability
- interruption in the baby's sleeping habits, either sleeping more or less
- vomiting
- bump or bruise on the head

### Signs of a concussion in toddlers

A toddler may be able to indicate when their head hurts and be more vocal about symptoms, which can include:

- headache
- nausea or vomiting
- behavior changes
- sleep changes — more or less sleeping
- excessive crying
- loss of interest in playing or doing their favorite activities

### Signs of a concussion in older children (Ages 2+)

Children older than 2 years may show more behavioral changes, such as:

- dizziness or balance problems
- double or blurry vision
- sensitivity to light
- sensitivity to noise
- looking like they're daydreaming
- trouble concentrating



- trouble remembering
- confused or forgetful about recent events
- slow to answer questions
- changes in mood — irritable, sad, emotional, nervous
- drowsiness
- change in sleep patterns
- difficulty sleeping

### **When to call the doctor**

What happens if you see your child fall on their head or otherwise get injured? How do you know when you need to take them to the doctor?

The most important thing you can do is watch your child very carefully. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is my child acting normally?
- Are they acting drowsier than normal?
- Has their behavior changed?

If your child is awake, active, and doesn't seem to be acting any different after a mild bump to the head, your child is most likely fine.

It's always a good idea, of course, to get your child checked out. You may not have to rush to the ER for a small bump on the head without any symptoms.

However, if your child is showing any signs of a concussion, you need to get medical attention right away, especially if they:

- are vomiting
- have lost consciousness for more than a minute or two
- are difficult to wake up
- have a seizure
- It's OK to let your child nap if they're sleepy after bumping their head, but monitor them very carefully after they wake up.

While no test can officially diagnose a concussion, a CT or MRI may occasionally be used to get a picture of the brain if the doctor suspects bleeding.

If you see that your child has unequal or larger than normal pupils (the small black spots in the eyes) after a head injury, this could indicate swelling around the brain and is a medical emergency.



## Treatment for a concussion

The only treatment for a concussion is rest. The brain needs lots and lots of rest to heal from a concussion. A full recovery can take months or even a year, depending on the severity of the concussion.

The most important thing you need to know about healing from a concussion is that the brain actually needs rest from both mental and physical activity.

After a concussion, don't allow your child to use screens of any kind, since those actually overstimulate and excite the brain. That means no:

- TV
- tablets
- music
- smartphones

Sleep is actually very healing for the brain, so encourage quiet time, naps, and early bedtimes to allow the brain as much time as possible to heal.

If your child has had a concussion, it's extremely important to prevent another concussion or head injury. Repeated concussions can cause permanent damage to the brain.

If your child shows any signs of regression after a concussion, like grogginess, confusion, or large mood swings, you should make an appointment with the doctor for a checkup.



***Medically reviewed by Karen Richardson Gill, MD on March 9, 2016 — Written by Chaunie Brusie, RN, BSN***

For more information on concussion in children and athletes: <https://cattonline.com/parent-caregiver/>







### Returning Back to Activities

Things I can do to get back to work or school

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