Youth Sports Concussions on the Rise

Sports-related concussions are a “hot topic” in the media and in medicine. Concussions are an invisible injury, but the consequences are real. A few years ago, athletes were encouraged to “shake it off” and tough out dings and bell ringers. Thanks to recent research, we now know that concussions are serious, and shrugging them off can have serious consequences.

Concussion Statistics
- The CDC estimates as many as 3.8 million concussions occur in the U.S. annually through sports and recreational activities.
- 5 of 10 concussions go unreported or undetected.
- 2 in 10 high-school athletes who play contact sports, including soccer and lacrosse, will suffer a concussion this year.
- Football has the highest incidence of concussions.
- Girls’ soccer sees the second-most concussions of all high school sports. Girls’ basketball sees the third most.

Concussion Facts
- A concussion is a brain injury that affects how your brain works.
- A concussion is caused by a blow to the head or body:
  - from contact with another player, hitting a hard surface such as the ground, ice, or court; or
  - being hit by a piece of equipment such as a lacrosse stick, hockey puck, or field hockey ball.
- A concussion can happen even if you haven’t been knocked unconscious.
- Playing or practicing with concussion symptoms is dangerous and can lead to a longer recovery and a delay in your return to play.
- If you think you have a concussion, you should not return to play on the day of the injury and until a healthcare professional says you are okay to return to play.

While your brain is still healing, you are much more likely to have another concussion. To avoid repeat injury, it’s crucial to manage concussions until complete recovery. Exercising or activities that involve a lot of concentration (such as studying, working on the computer, or playing video games) may cause concussion symptoms to reappear or get worse.

Recognition and education are paramount, because although proper equipment, sport technique, and adherence to rules of the sport may decrease the incidence or severity of concussions, nothing has been shown to prevent them. Appropriate management is essential for reducing the risk of long-term symptoms and complications. Cognitive and physical rest is the mainstay of management after diagnosis. Returning to a sport should be accomplished by using a progressive exercise program while evaluating for any return of signs or symptoms.
When I recently went to my primary care physician for my annual physical, she performed an EKG for general diagnostic purposes. I never imagined that something would turn up as a result of my tests. My primary care physician sent me to a cardiologist for further testing. Another EKG was performed in addition to an Echocardiogram. After the tests, the cardiologist said he wanted to schedule a stress test. The explanation seemed vague to me, but I scheduled the next appointment hoping for a final result and some peace of mind.

The next appointment only brought further questions and more vague answers from the cardiologist. Another test was recommended and at this point I contacted ConnectCare3. I was hoping that they could help me justify having the next test or at least give me some other options. I wasn't really sure why the next test was necessary and had the feeling that I was in a never-ending loop.

I contacted the ConnectCare3 staff and was amazed at how friendly and knowledgeable the Patient Advocate and Nurse Navigator were about my issues. After voicing my concerns to my Nurse Navigator, she explained the procedure recommended by my cardiologist. She also suggested that I contact my primary care physician and schedule a follow-up appointment to go over my test results from the cardiologist. I could also discuss the option of a second opinion. My Nurse Navigator provided me with some questions that I could ask my primary care physician as a starting point. The appointment went well. I was able to understand the test results along with the need for further testing. I called and scheduled my next test with the cardiologist the following day.

My ConnectCare3 Nurse Navigator followed-up with me at every step by phone and e-mail. It was just like having a sister with a nursing degree looking out for me. Everyone should have an advocate when faced with a potential life-threatening situation. I would not hesitate to involve ConnectCare3 again should I face another health crisis.