

Tips on Concussion for Dancers

Concussions can occur in daily activity as well as during any sport or recreational activities - including dance. Concussions can have immediate and long lasting effects on an individual. Therefore, all concussions are considered serious. It is essential that dancers, dance educators, dance coaches, parents, and healthcare providers learn the signs and symptoms of concussion and what to do if a concussion occurs.

What is a Concussion?

A concussion is a traumatic brain injury (or TBI) caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body that can alter the way the brain normally works. Even what might be considered a “mild” bump, blow, or “ding” to the head can result in severe consequences - serious consequences are not limited only to those with loss of consciousness. In fact less than 10% of concussions involve a loss of consciousness. “Mild” impacts may affect the dancers’ ability to perform daily mental and physical tasks, may result in changes in mood and personality, and may reduce the dancers’ ability to safely participate in dance activity. Each concussion is unique and each affects the injured dancer in a different way. Recognition and proper response to concussions when they first occur is imperative to help prevent further injury or even death.

How to Recognize Signs and Symptoms of Concussion:

A dancer may experience or demonstrate any of the signs or symptoms below after sustaining a bump, blow or jolt to the head or body. Keys to identifying concussion include an observed or reported forceful impact that results in rapid head movement AND any changes in the dancer’s behavior, thinking, or physical function. It is important to remember that you can’t “see” a concussion and that not all dancers will experience or report the symptoms right away. Some dancers may wait for hours or even days after the injury to report a problem.

Signs Observed by Others	Symptoms Reported by Dancer
Appears dazed or confused	Headache or “pressure” in head
Is confused	Nausea, vomiting, numbness or tingling
Forgetfulness	Balance problems or dizziness
Is unsure of surroundings	Double or blurry vision, ringing in the ears
Moves clumsily/is uncoordinated	Sensitivity to light and noise
Answers questions slowly	Increased emotional behavior/irritability
Loses consciousness (even briefly)	Concentration or memory problems
Demonstrates mood, behavior, or personality changes	Feeling sluggish, low energy, foggy, or groggy
Can’t recall events prior to hit or fall	Confusion
Can’t recall events after hit or fall	Does not “feel right” or “feeling down”
Seizures immediately after the hit/fall	Problems with insomnia or excessive sleep

What to do if a Concussion Occurs:

Dancers who experience any of the signs or symptoms listed above following a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body should be immediately kept out of dance participation and any activities that increase symptoms until a licensed health care provider, experienced in evaluating for concussion, says they are symptom-free and that it is safe to return to activity. Do not try to judge the severity of the injury yourself. A repeat concussion that occurs before the brain has recovered from the first trauma —usually within a short time period (hours, days, weeks)—can slow the recovery process and/or increase the chances for long-term problems. Thus the importance of monitoring and clearance by a licensed healthcare provider trained in concussion management.

If the **dancer loses consciousness** following an impact to the head or body, a qualified healthcare provider or first aid responder should immediately perform a primary survey to ensure the dancer's airway, breathing and circulation are not compromised, and to check for signs of additional injury. If consciousness is not regained by the completion of the primary survey, the Emergency Medical System (EMS, 911) should be activated for transportation and evaluation at the nearest medical facility.

Management:

Most individuals with a concussion will fully recover in a timely manner (7-10 days) given early and proper care. But for some individuals, signs and symptoms of concussion can last for days, weeks, or longer and may be present during daily functioning, not only with exercise or dance activity. Research informs us that some aspects of cognition and the bodies balance system can be affected for months following concussion.

Concussion management includes both physical and cognitive (mental) rest until symptoms resolve for all activities of daily living prior to returning to dance. If there is any question whether or not a dancer should participate, current guidelines state **“When in doubt, sit them out.”** Provide this fact sheet to the dancer's parent, guardian or roommate.

- **All dance activity (class, rehearsal etc.) should stop until the injured dancer is properly taken care of**
- **Monitoring for mental or physical deterioration** over the initial few hours after injury is essential
- **Restful sleep and relaxation.** Like any injury, the injured body part (in this case the brain) needs rest from activity to promote the healing. This can mean rest from television, computers, reading, texting and even music
- **Acetaminophen** (Tylenol) can be taken safely
- **DO NOT** drink alcohol, take sleeping medication, aspirin or anti-inflammatory medication (i.e. Advil)
- **DO NOT RETURN TO DANCE THE SAME DAY AS THE INJURY**, even if symptoms resolve
- **DO** return to dance only after being cleared by a licensed healthcare provider experienced in concussion management, which may include a variety of tests designed to assess brain function (neurocognitive tests)

Return to Dance:

Once the dancer's symptoms have resolved with daily activity, the dancer should follow a step-wise return to dance protocol. The dancer should only progress to the next level if symptom free at the current level and **if at any stage the dancer experiences a recurrence of symptoms, he/she needs to return to the previous level of activity until the symptoms resolve and should not try to progress for at least 24 hours.** Each step may take a minimum of one day, depending on the duration or recurrence of symptoms. Dancers will progress through the following at differing rates:

- **No physical activity until the dancer is asymptomatic (has no symptoms) at rest**
- **Light aerobic exercise** (walking or stationary bike, but not resistance training)
- **Dance specific training, exercise and daily activities** (partial class with no jumping, doing laundry)
- **Non-contact dance training and return to cognitive skills** (light reading and computer work)
- **Full contact dance training after medical clearance** (may include cognitive and physical testing)
- **Return to unrestricted class, rehearsal, performance after medical clearance**

Who Might a Dancer Work with Following Concussion:

A dancer may work with a number of licensed healthcare providers who will assist in his/her recovery including: certified athletic trainers, physiotherapists, sports medicine physicians, neuro-psychologists, psychiatrists, and/or osteopaths.

Additional Information:

- <http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/HeadsUp/Training/index.html>
- <http://www.ncaa.org/wps/wcm/connect/public/NCAA/Health+and+Safety/Concussion+homepage/Concussion+Landing+Page>
- http://www.amssm.org/Content/pdf%20files/2012_ConcussionPositionStmnt.pdf
- <http://www.nata.org/position-statements>

Disclaimer:

The information presented here related to concussion injury is to help guide and inform the dancer and training staff, it is not meant to take the place of the advice of a medical professional.

This information is provided by Dance/USA Task Force on Dancer Health.