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Q: As a parent with boys involved in contact sports, I'm concerned about the long-term effects of concussions. How dangerous are concussions for young people and how can they be prevented?

A: Concussions occur when a blow to the head causes the brain to physically shift within the skull, which may result in confusion, **headaches, temporary memory loss, or loss of consciousness**. Those sports that present the greatest risk of concussion include boxing, football, hockey and soccer.

The majority of young people who suffer isolated concussions recover completely. Still, sustaining one concussion has been found to increase the risk of additional concussions. After multiple concussions, it **can** take less impact to cause subsequent concussions and more recovery time may be required.

The long-term effects of multiple concussions in adults and kids **are still unclear but continue to be studied**. **Some** studies of professional athletes who experienced multiple sports-related concussions suggest a higher incidence of depression, Alzheimer's disease and brain damage.

Concussions may not always be preventable, but there are ways to substantially reduce the risk. It can't be expressed enough how important protective equipment, such as well-fitting helmets and mouth guards, is in keeping kids safe from head injuries.

Coaches, trainers, parents and physicians can also help reduce the risk of additional concussions by making sure the signs and symptoms are properly understood, recognized and fully treated before allowing athletes to return to contact sports.

Always consult your child's doctor when injuries occur, or if you have additional questions or concerns.