

# Injuries and Children: When to Take Your Child to the Doctor

Injuries are a common childhood experience that can happen at any age – whether it's the newly mobile baby rolling off the bed, the elementary school kid falling off the jungle gym, or the teenage athlete colliding with an opposing team member.

## Minor Injuries



### Head injuries

It's normal for kids to cry after they've hit their heads – it hurts and it's scary! Crying shouldn't last longer than 10 minutes. If your child is alert and responds to you, the head injury is likely mild. To soothe them, you can apply a cold compress to help the swelling go down. Check with your child's physician before giving any over the counter medicine for pain. You don't want to mask pain or symptoms that suggest a serious head injury. You can let your child go to sleep if it's naptime or bedtime, but check on them every two to three hours to make sure everything is OK. Changes to watch for include inconsolable crying or fussiness, vomiting more than once, balancing difficulties when sitting or walking, and being unresponsive.



### Sprains & Strains

Most sports injuries are caused by minor trauma. These injuries include sprains (ligament injuries resulting from twisting a joint) and strains (injuries to a muscle or tendon, and are often caused by overuse, force, or stretching). While these injuries can occur in various parts of the body, the ankle is the most commonly sprained or strained joint. Common symptoms for sprains and strains include:

- Pain in the injured area
- Swelling in the injured area
- Difficulty using or moving the injured area in a normal manner
- Warmth, bruising, or redness in the injured area

If your child has been examined and diagnosed with one of these types of injuries by your pediatrician, common treatments include:

- medications to help control pain and swelling
- restricting activities
- a splint, wrap, or sling
- crutches if affecting the lower extremities
- physical therapy to stretch and strengthen the injured muscles, ligaments, and tendons is sometimes recommended



## Cuts, Scratches, and Scrapes

You might think a cut or scrape is no big deal. But any time the skin gets broken, there's a risk of infection. So it helps to understand how to care for cuts and scrapes at home — and know when you need to see a doctor. If your child takes a tumble and the result is a small cut or scrape, it will usually heal well without medical care. Here's what to do if the injury isn't serious:

- Stop bleeding by pressing a clean, soft cloth against the wound for a few minutes.
- Clean the wound. Run water over the cut for a few minutes. Then use soap to gently wash the cut or scrape thoroughly. If there's dirt or debris in the wound (like gravel from a scrape), remove it if you can — *If you can't get all the dirt out, call your doctor's office.*
- Cover the wound with gauze or other type of bandage



## Sunburn or minor burns

Although parents should always be careful to protect their children with a broad-spectrum sunscreen whenever they are outdoors, sunburns may still accidentally occur, especially on or near the water. If your child is experiencing a great deal of discomfort, an evaluation by one of our pediatricians can provide topical treatment and pain relief. The same is true for minor burns from a hot surface or other sources.

## Serious Injuries

### Head injuries

Severe head injuries can cause changes in memory, judgment, balance, reaction time, speech and sleep. They can also cause headaches and sensitivity to light and sound. Your child should be seen by a physician if he/she displays any of these symptoms or if your child loses consciousness. Your physician may order imaging if your child's symptoms are severe. Usually, a child should have at least one week of no symptoms before going back to regular activity and return should be gradual. This process is best guided by your child's physician.

### Fractures

A fracture is a break or crack in the bone, and can happen in any bone of the body. If your child's pain is sudden, severe, or persistent, or if there is an obvious deformity to the area injured, you should see your child's doctor. X-ray images

may be ordered to diagnose if a fracture is present. Some severe fractures require surgical intervention. Less severe fractures may be casted in our office by one of Littleton Pediatric Medical Center's physicians.

### Lacerations

If your child sustains an injury that results in a wound that is very long or deep or if its edges are far apart, a doctor will need to bring the edges close together so they can heal. The doctor might do this with stitches and often can be done by one of the physicians at Littleton Pediatric Medical Center. Cuts from a bite should also be examined by one of our physicians. Germs from an animal or human mouth can get into the cut and you will usually need antibiotics to prevent infection. Cuts from something dirty or rusty, like a nail, could lead to a tetanus infection if your tetanus shots are not up to date.



If you have any questions about your child's injury or the need for medical treatment, please contact us at (303) 791-9999 for our Highlands Ranch office or (303) 979-1234 for our Ken Caryl office