

Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Foundation Trust: Information for Families

Skull fracture

This information sheet from Great Ormond Street Hospital explains the causes, symptoms and treatment of skull fracture and where to get help.

A skull fracture is when bone in the skull has been broken by an injury or trauma. A skull fracture is when bone in the skull has been broken by an injury or trauma. As the skull is very strong, it takes a lot of force to damage it. This might be from falling from a height, a car accident or a direct blow to the head.

Most skull fractures in children are caused when children are playing. There are different types of skull fractures, varying in severity. All head injuries should be taken seriously, but most children with a simple, straightforward fracture will make a full recovery.

What causes a skull fracture?

A skull fracture is caused by an injury or trauma to the head. A child may have fallen from a height, such as in a playground, and hit their head. Most skull fractures in children are caused when children are playing. Anyone can get a skull fracture.

There are four main types of skull fracture:

- Linear fractures are the most common. They are generally straight-forward breaks in the skull.
- Depressed fractures are where the skull

has been pushed in. Surgery may be needed to lift the bone if it is putting pressure on the brain.

- Diastatic fractures are when a break occurs in more than one of the bones in the skull that are connected together. This causes the join to widen. This is usually found in young children because the bones in the skull have not fused together properly yet.
- Basilar fractures are the most uncommon and appear at the base of the skull and can risk damage to the spinal cord

What are the signs and symptoms of a skull fracture?

If a child has hit their head, signs of a fracture include:

- A lump or dent on the head
- Bruising or swelling on the head
- Headache
- Confusion or disorientation
- Dizziness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Loss of consciousness
- Clear fluid or blood running from the nose or ears
- Bruising around the eyes (panda eyes



How is a skull fracture normally diagnosed?

If a child has hit their head it is vital they are checked by a doctor. A head injury or skull fracture can be very serious, even if the child initially seems fine. As the skull protects the brain, a skull fracture can also cause a brain injury.

An x-ray will check for broken bones or fractures in the skull. A CT scan looks inside the body to check the child's brain for any signs of injury.

How is a skull fracture normally treated?

Treatment will depend on the type of skull fracture the child has and how severe it is. It can take months for a skull fracture to heal, but the younger the child is, the faster it will heal.

If the child has an open wound on their head, it will need to be cleaned to avoid infection. Medicine can be given to treat the symptoms, such as nausea and pain.

Surgery may be needed for a serious fracture if the bones have moved or if there are any fragments.

What happens next?

It is vital that all head injuries should be checked out at hospital. Most children with a simple, straightforward fracture will make a full recovery. More serious skull fractures will require treatment and maybe surgery.

Notes	

Compiled by the GOSH web team

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