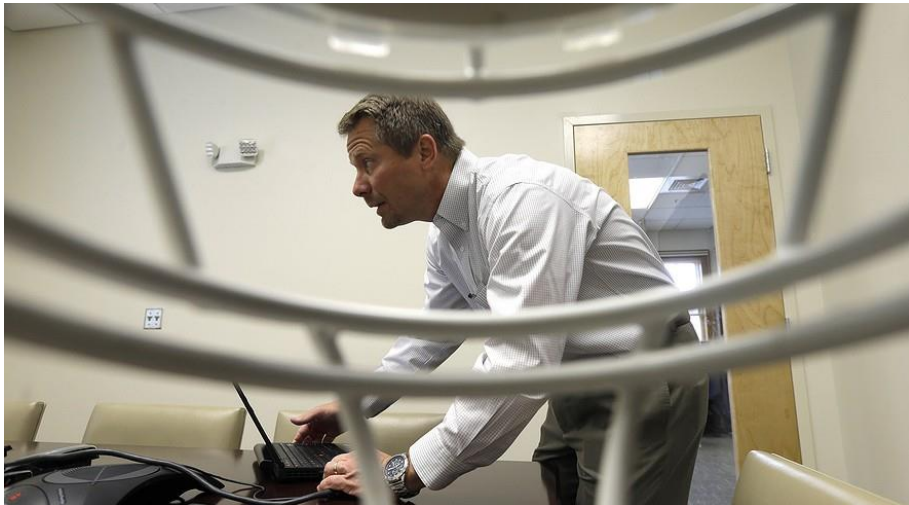


# Study shows students have ongoing academic problems after concussions

By Los Angeles Times, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.28.15  
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*Kevin Guskiewicz, professor and former chair of the Department of Exercise and Sports Medicine at the College of Arts and Sciences, is framed by a football helmet at the University of North Carolina College of Arts and Sciences in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, May 13, 2015. Photo: AP Photo/Gerry Broome*

It happens in an instant, but the effects last much longer. A student is shaken by a car accident or gets hit in the head while playing sports. Weeks later, they are still struggling with schoolwork as the result of a "mild traumatic brain injury," also known as an MTBI or concussion.

New research published by the journal *Pediatrics* shows that, after experiencing a concussion, nearly 9 in 10 teens who continue to show symptoms of brain injury also experience

academic problems. Headaches, fatigue and difficulty concentrating make schoolwork even more challenging.

For most mild brain injuries, the recovery process takes a week to three weeks. Three-quarters of students whose symptoms last longer report a decline in academic skills like note-taking, studying and completing homework assignments.

## Symptoms Worse For Older Students

The *Pediatrics* study examined 349 students ages 5 to 18 who had suffered an MTBI. Within four weeks of their injury, 240 of the concussed students continued to experience physical and cognitive symptoms of brain injury, including headaches, dizziness, light sensitivity and problems with their mood and concentration.

In that group, those with the highest academic demands — generally students in middle and high school — were most likely to report persistent symptoms of MTBI along with difficulties concentrating and keeping up with schoolwork. Math was most frequently cited as the greatest academic challenge.

The study also found that, when parents noticed mood changes in their concussed children, those students were more likely to report academic difficulties.

## Academic Issues Are Not Unusual

Even among children considered to be recovering well, academic issues were common. In this group, 38 percent reported that headaches, concentration problems and fatigue had made school more difficult. Forty-four percent said concussion symptoms affected their note-taking skills and homework completion.

Students coping with ongoing concussion symptoms face unique academic challenges. They need what the study's authors call "targeted supports." Their research indicated that schools help students with learning disabilities year-round, but

frequently overlook the short-term needs of students with brain injuries.

### **Injured Students Need Accommodations**

Researchers recommend that health care professionals provide families with post-concussion plans to pass along to schools. Each plan should request specific academic accommodations based on a student's individual symptoms.

During the recovery phase, a patient's time at school might be limited. Their homework might be reduced and they might need to take frequent breaks or reschedule tests. Teachers might need to let a concussed student leave class a few minutes early so that they don't get caught in all of the noise and confusion of passing periods. Injured students might also prefer to eat lunch in a quiet place by themselves.

An earlier article in Pediatrics offered concussion symptom checklists. The checklists were designed to help families and physicians identify symptoms that are triggered by school-related activities and track students' progress as they recover.