Concussions May Affect Student Athletes' Classroom Performance

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Sports fans are well aware that it can take a long time for student athletes to get back into the game after a blow to the head. And now findings published in the Journal of Radiology suggest that recovery time from a concussion can last far beyond the physical symptoms caused by the trauma, The Wall Street Journal reports.

For the study, New York University brain-injury specialists evaluated a small sample of 28 student athletes during a one-year period. Researchers found that changes in the brain of these students were detectable for a full year after just one mild concussion. What's more, findings showed that the harder students focused on mental activity after suffering a concussion, the more intense the headaches or dizziness they experienced.

Pediatric neuropsychologists who commented on the findings said that the after-effects of concussions could make it harder for student athletes to focus on studies, take tests or pay attention in the classroom. "A concussion is an academic injury, in the sense that it affects the capacity for learning," said Gerard Gioia, MD, a pediatric neuropsychologist at the Children's National Medical Center in Washington.

Researchers warned that if underlying mental issues aren't treated properly, head injuries could have the potential to affect student athletes' grades, SAT scores and placement test results well into their academic career.

Experts suggest that students recovering from concussions should not return to school unless they can focus their mental attention for at least 30 minutes of study. In addition, schools may require that these students take 10-minute breaks after each half hour of study to avoid the possibility of causing more injury to the brain. (On average, most student athletes recover from a head injury in about three weeks.)

Finally, heads up! It's not just concussions that can cause long-term mental effects. Repeatedly hitting a soccer ball with your noggin may, over time, lead to brain injuries that affect memory. For more information, click here.