Doctors want mandatory baseline tests for teen athletes
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SALT LAKE CITY -- Worried about the risk of concussions, some Utah doctors are pushing for a mandatory baseline test for those signing up for high-impact sports. The test is required in most professional sports, but not at a high school or junior high level.

**Between 1.4 and 3.6 million sports and recreation-related concussions occur each year, with the majority happening at the high school level. -CDC**

Most concussion injuries are mild and treatable, but only because they're recognized early, within 48 hours. Sarah Palmer suffered a concussion while playing basketball.

We met Sarah during our visit to the new University of Utah Concussion Clinic. She said she was completely dizzy, like in a fog, for the first two months after the injury.

At first, Sarah didn't think it was that bad. She tried to rejoin her team a month later.

"I went back in early," she said. "I thought I was ready, and I almost threw up because I got jolted around."

The risk is well-recognized in high school sports like football. In fact, on college and professional levels, especially the NFL and the National Hockey League, players have to take what is called an "ImPACT Baseline Test." Except for Ben Lomond High School in Ogden, Utah high schools and junior high schools do not require the test.

**It is estimated that at least 10 to 20 percent of all athletes involved in contact sports have a concussion each season. -CDC**

The brief exercise measures visual and verbal memory, reaction time and processing speed based on the individual's own normal brain response.

"It's important to have a standard for comparison, because if you're scoring with everybody else who's had a concussion, you don't know what you're like normally," said Lucius Bynum, a young Utah athlete.

Later, if an athlete sustains a "head hit," this first test becomes a comparison tool. According to neuropsychologist Anthony Morrison, "We can tell by, comparing the post-concussion score to the baseline, if there is a significant deterioration in the performance, which may not be obvious and may not be picked up on a cat scan or an MRI."

**Loss of consciousness occurs in only 10 percent of concussions. -Center for Human Potential**

The test is like a barometer. Combined with managed care, the athlete knows how much down time is needed for the brain to recover.

Jane Maus, another young athlete, said, "I notice when the shapes are switched around. But if you have a concussion, I could see how you couldn't even tell at all. You wouldn't be able to remember any of the shapes."
What doctors don't want is even a mild second or third hit to the head because a player goes back into the game too soon. What started out as a short-term subtle injury could then become a long-lasting one.

Dr. Colby Hansen, with University of Utah Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine, warns some could experience "long-lasting symptoms of headaches, fatigue, difficulty concentrating and difficulty remembering."

**What is... a concussion?**

![Image of a head with a brain inside]

Concussions are a type of traumatic brain injury, caused by a blow or jolt to the head that can range from mild to severe and can disrupt the way the brain normally works. - CDC

"It becomes a global cognitive dysfunction," Hansen said.

Morrison, Colby, and some of their colleagues believe Utah high schools and junior high schools should have mandatory baseline testing for young athletes.

A large high school would pay about $500 to test all of its athletes each year. But to drive home their message over the next several weeks, the Center for Human Potential will offer 500 tests free on a first come, first serve basis.

The test takes only 25 minutes and can be given at a computer lab in any school. [CLICK HERE](#) to apply for one of the free tests.