



Concussions and Kids and Consumers' Pocket Books

By Patrick A. Malone

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A hot topic in the world of sport safety these days is concussion. It's not the first time **we've covered the topic**. Thanks to an increasing awareness that concussions can lead to traumatic brain injury (TBI), cognitive decline and other problems, athletes are monitored more closely for signs of head injury.

But greater awareness and better medicine have a concussion traveling companion of a decidedly consumer orientation. So-called "anti-concussion" sports equipment is making its market move. As always, it's buyer beware.

As reported in the **Los Angeles Times**, no piece of equipment, no matter how technologically advanced, can indicate the presence of brain damage, or guarantee protection from it.

Testifying a couple of weeks ago at a U.S. Senate hearing, Jeffrey Kutcher, chairman of the American Academy of Neurology's sports section, said, "I wish there was such a product on the market. The simple truth is that no current helmet, mouth guard, headband or other piece of equipment can significantly prevent concussions from occurring."

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Parents are a target market for these products, and football is a prime activity:

- Item: a \$149 chin strap made by Battle Sports Science called the Impact Indicator that features colored lights to "help" indicate whether a player has a concussion.
- Item: the Brain-Pad LoPro mouth guard, which promises "brain safety space."
- Item: Riddell's Revolution helmet, whose pitch is to reduce the number of concussions by 31%. Kutcher said research showed that the helmet decreased concussions by only 2.6%.

Good equipment is key, whether you're a 12-year-old middle linebacker or a 47-year-old softball catcher. But the best way to prevent brain damage (or worse) after a head injury is to take the time necessary to recover. Children have relatively heavier heads than adults, and because their brains are still developing, the incidence and severity of their head injuries is higher.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the number of **traumatic brain injuries among young athletes** has increased 60% over the last 10 years. In 2001, 153,375 young athletes were admitted to emergency rooms for concussions and other sports-related head injuries. In 2009, that number had climbed to 248,418. Approximately 298 youths per 100,000 suffered a head injury in 2009. Males 10 to 19 had the highest rate of injuries.

Motorcycle and auto accidents account for about 20% of traumatic brain injuries. According to the CDC, the most common sports and games leading to TBI are:

- bicycling
- playground activities
- football
- basketball
- soccer.

It's difficult to resist the appeals of a kid who can't wait to get back into the soccer game. But if she was dizzy, nauseous, had vision problems or a headache, even momentarily, she's done until a doctor examines her. And certainly anyone who has gotten knocked out should be seen by a doctor immediately.

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