

Concussions

Concussions are a fact of life in all contact sports. When a motocross racer crashes, it is usually the ground, not another athlete, that they make contact with. Crashing in motocross is not so affectionately known as “eating dirt, auguring oneself into the ground or any number of other unpleasant metaphors”. Despite the extensive use of protective equipment by motocross racers, including the best helmets that money can buy, concussions can and do happen to many racers at some point in their career.

New research has come to light in recent years on how to grade the severity of a concussion, and a panel of experts recently got together in Austria to redefine exactly what a concussion is.



Here's what they found:

-A concussion can result from a direct blow to any part of the body where force is transmitted to the head – in other words, you don't even need to hit your head to suffer a concussion.

-A concussion usually results in the rapid onset of short-lived impairment in brain function that resolves on its own. Examples of this include short-term memory loss and the sensation of “seeing stars”.

-You do not need to get knocked out to suffer from a concussion. Even “ringing your bell” is a sign that you've likely suffered a mild concussion.

-If you do lose consciousness, the length of time that you're out for does not always correlate with the severity of your concussion.

-An inability to sleep well, a feeling of fatigue or depression after a fall may indicate that a concussion has occurred or not resolved. In these cases, a visit to your sports medicine physician is a must.

-Theoretically, neck muscle conditioning may be of value in reducing impact forces transmitted to the brain.

-Deciding when to return to racing is a decision that is best left to your physician. In principle, your return to riding and racing should be done in stages. Start small, and gradually build up the time and intensity at which you're able to ride a practice moto. Ideally you should be free of *any* symptoms and be able to ride hard in practice with out feeling “off” at all. Symptoms can include such things as dizziness, nausea, headaches or even altered sweating. If you can't do this, drop back to the lowest level at which you feel good at and try to progress again after a couple of days.

-If you suffer a number of concussions in a row, or even in the same season, consider taking the rest of the season off. Each concussion you have makes you more prone to having more. Concussions also slow down your reaction time, making it more likely that you will crash again and suffer a more serious concussion.



Invest in the best helmet you can afford, and replace it after a hard crash, or particularly if you notice any dents or cracks in the liner or the shell. As the old saying goes, “if you've got a \$2 head, buy a \$2 helmet”.