

KATHERINE'S STORY

Katherine Noh loves team sports. When she isn't on the soccer field, you can find her playing volleyball and basketball. She likes the bond she forms with her teammates and the action of team sports. Then, last year at the basketball regional finals, something happened that changed everything.

"My job as a power forward is to go for a rebound," explains Katherine. "As I went for this one rebound I was pulling the ball in and shaking off my defender who was a really tall girl – around six feet, four inches. She reached in and I continued to hold onto the ball when she flung me away. Since I was hugging onto the ball I wasn't able to protect my head for the fall. So I landed head first on the ground, and that's when I got my concussion."

When Katherine hit her head she immediately became dizzy and confused, and sounds were suddenly very loud. But since there were only a few minutes left and it was the final game of the season, she shook it off and got right back in the game.

Katherine recalls the sequence of events that followed: "After the game, we had our little pep talk outside in the hallway. And then, in the middle of the pep talk, I don't know what happened but my head just started ringing. Finally I just broke down in tears and was shaking. They didn't really know what to do and I was unable to speak and very emotional."

Katherine's coach and the other players knew there was something wrong, but weren't sure what had happened.

"At first everyone thought I was dehydrated," Katherine says, "but then my coach told me to go to the hospital, just in case. But I shook them off, because hospitals overwhelm me and I'm not comfortable there."

Instead, Katherine's mom took her to the family doctor because that's who she felt most comfortable seeing. Katherine remembers that she continued to cry on the way to the doctor's office, and her mom yelling, "Katherine! Stay with me! Count to ten over and over again!"

The doctor quickly identified that Katherine had suffered a concussion. He wanted her to take a full year off of sports and any activity that involved moving her head around. At first, Katherine didn't take her concussion too seriously.

"I didn't really want to stay home because I wanted to make other people think I was OK so I could go back into sports. I didn't go to school the next day, but the day after I did go back. Everyone was asking 'are you OK?'"

"I went home halfway through the day because my head was pounding and I felt drowsy, like I was lagging. When I got home I started to vomit and then my head was hurting." Everyday sounds bothered her: she had to turn the TV

off because it sounded so loud, even though the volume was very low.

Her symptoms continued throughout the following months. She was sensitive to sound and light, and sometimes she'd feel extremely hot. She had headaches everyday and found it impossible to concentrate.

In time, and with rest, Katherine began to improve and make small steps to return to activity.

The biggest challenge for Katherine was being treated differently by her friends, schoolmates and teachers. She didn't like the special attention that she received because of her concussion, and as a result she tried to downplay it and pretend that nothing was wrong.

It was difficult to resist the temptation to jump back into activity too quickly. On her lunch hours, Katherine would watch her peers playing soccer. They'd call to her to join in. Sometimes she would say no, but other times she would go out on the field and begin to kick the ball around. Her teachers would see her and tell her to get off the field.

Katherine's reaction was a common one. When she was on the field or court, she always played hard and never considered that she could injure herself. And after her concussion, she didn't imagine that it would affect her the way it did. After all, everything she knew about concussion, she had learned from movies and TV.

"I'd just seen movies where you'd hit your head and say 'oh no, don't worry, I'm OK'. Then you'd spring back up and skip away. It's not like that. That was the worst time in my life, the concussion, and I don't want to get another one.

"If I could tell others one thing, it would be to make sure you speak up if you've hit your head or you think you may have a concussion. Don't hide it and hope that it will just go away. It's really important to get help right away."

If you follow Katherine's advice and get help immediately, you are more likely to recover and get back to regular activity faster.

"I wish I knew what I know now," Katherine says. "You have to know what to do, and keep your head in the game."