

Hit your head? Don't just shake it off

A January grocery trip for Charlotte Davis turned out to be life-altering.

The Shipman, Illinois, woman was loading food into the back of her van when she says the hydraulics failed, and the back door slammed into her head.

While she didn't lose consciousness or have any visible signs of trauma, Davis doesn't mince words: "It hurt really bad."

Davis says she put up with worsening headaches, garbled speech and weakened memory as long as she could.

"I tried to drive one day. I hit a flower pot, drove through the ditch, missed my turn, forgot where I was going three times," Davis says. "My eight year old granddaughter told her mom, 'Please don't let Mawmaw drive anymore. She's scaring me.'"

When a CAT Scan found no brain bleed, Davis wound up at the [OSF HealthCare rehabilitation office](#) in Alton, Illinois. She was skeptical at first but now considers herself a prime example of why you shouldn't just shake off a head injury – whether it's in a football game or just around the house.

Physical therapist Kelly Bogowith cared for Davis at the Alton office.

"All concussions are a form of at least mild traumatic brain injury," Bogowith says. "So it's important to make sure that you get assessed and also ensure that you're not playing sports later that same day. A provider can give you education on how long you should be sitting out from sports and other physical activities, as well. And that might even include work."

"Sometimes with concussions, we may not have symptoms for hours or even weeks afterwards. So it's important to get checked out by your physician, urgent care, emergency department, or athletic trainer, depending on your setting," Bogowith adds. "But it's not something to shake off. And it can be especially important, too, to not have a second concussion because that can be very dangerous and even deadly."

Every patient recovering from a head knock receives a specially-tailored plan, Bogowith says. The roadmap could include different types of therapy, like physical or speech language. It will always include at-home activities – stretches for physical therapy or puzzles for speech language therapy, for example. And the OSF HealthCare team encourages you to ask questions along the way.

Davis' plan started with massages and stretches to relieve tension. She progressed to walking, then running on a treadmill.

"I beat that treadmill," Davis says, beaming.

She beat the non-physical aspects, too. Davis' memory and speech improved to the point that when she met with speech language pathologist Ashley Brim at the Alton location, it was a one-and-done.

"[Speech therapy] can range within working on targeting problem solving skills," Brim explains. "So,

either really basic problem solving all the way up to reading paragraphs of information. And trying to figure out information that, most of the time, people don't think about. We can just read it and figure it out. But when you have a concussion, and that is impacting you, it makes it 10 times more difficult."

"We work on a lot of memory tasks," Brim continues. "Exercises for working on memorizing word lists, figuring out different ways to help the patient memorize things better. So they associate the word to something else and then they use those associations to be able to remember what has been said to them and chain it all together."

What people in Bogowith and Brim's roles don't want to see: people relying solely on pills to get through pain. That can lead to addiction and side effects. Therapy is somewhat the opposite, Brim notes. It gives the patient ownership of their recovery.

Davis agrees with that assessment and says her determination to see therapy through to the end has paid off in multiple ways. Most notably, she can handle playing with her eight grandkids.

"I want people to know that it's important," Davis says. "I understand that it's a pain. It's not always convenient. There are always other things people want to do. But if your doctor says to do therapy, I 100% will tell you: go to therapy. You don't know how bad you need it until you actually go."

For more information on types of rehabilitation, visit the [OSF HealthCare website](#) or talk to your primary care provider. OSF HealthCare also offers [neurological services](#).