

DENMARK

How many headbutters does the duo have? Top American researchers have a clue as to where becomes unhealthy

Michael L. Lipton has for many years researched head impacts among football players, and in his research he has come up with an estimate on when head impacts can potentially have an impact on the brain and memory.



Michael L. Lipton is a researcher at the elite university Columbia University. He knows that head impacts can have an impact on people's cognitive functions.
Photo: Diane Bondareff

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Messi did it in the Champions League final in 2009, when he found the right corner of the goal with his head Manchester United. Dutch Van Persie did it when he got the ball about 14 meters from the goal directed over Spanish goalkeeper Iker Casillas for the 2014 World Cup.

Today, the goals stand as exemplary ways to use your head to make the net flap and make fans around the world either cheer or watch helplessly as your heart's team must pick up the ball in own network.

But few will probably think about the risk associated with these head blows.

Michael L. Lipton has calculated and researched that risk for the past 15 years, and he still does so today at the elite Columbia University in New York, where he is a professor of radiology. Therefore, he also knows that it is not entirely without risk when professional footballers thunder the loudest in one headbutt duel.

"The existing research in the area should raise concerns that the negative effects of playing football are real. And we should try to understand that in order to better protect the players,' he says to Berlingske over a video link from New York.

But, he also emphasizes, "there is still a lot we don't know".

How many headbutters does the duo make a year?

Michael Lipton isn't the only one who knows what happens when an inflated football hits the forehead.

In 2019, researchers from the University of Glasgow did a large study in which they identified 7,676 professional soccer players and compared it with 23,000 control subjects.

They found that the risk of having Alzheimer's disease listed on the death certificate was as much as five times increased for the football players. At the same time, the risk of ALS was increased four times and Parkinson's doubled.

"It's as safe as it gets. You can never investigate it completely because of the ethical, but you can say with great certainty that there is a clear connection,' said neuropsychologist Kasper Jørgensen to [Berlingske in an earlier article](#) about the subject.

But it takes more than just a few headbutts a week before it will have an effect, says Michael L. Lipton. In fact, with his own research project, he was able to observe that players who "headed in the range from ten to a few hundred times each year, was generally unaffected.'

But that changes when the number becomes four digits:

- **1,200 head impacts per year**

"More than 1,200 head impacts per year were associated with microscopic changes in the brain structure,' he explains.

- **18.00 headbutt per year**

"We could not see a change in the function of the brain itself until the number of headers per year reached over 1,800 times. Here, the head impacts are associated with a worsening memory ability.'

However, Michael L. Lipton stresses that these are just "estimates that are specific to the players we have." investigated":

"One should not take these estimates as absolute limits. But they are important because they show us that there is a point where negative effects of head impacts in football can develop.'

And the negative effects are not limited to Alzheimer's disease.

A piece of advice for football players

"People who do not develop dementia can still have negative consequences from headbutting," says Michael L. Lipton fixed.

Michael L. Lipton explains that people who do a lot of head banging and who don't get dementia can still experience effects on cognitive function. Because we do not yet understand the potential meaning that many head impacts can have on people's daily functioning.

"We know that many university students play sports at a high level. But at the same time they must develop professionally,' he says:

"A more important question than whether there is potential for late-life dementia may be: Can we find out how these repeated blows to the head can have a negative impact on people that we otherwise assume, is working normally?"

Therefore, the American researcher also has a piece of advice for the footballers who run around with a certain one concern on the lawn:

"If someone came to me and said: 'I want to play football, but I don't want to get injured from it'. So I would say, 'Minimize how many headbutts you do.'"

LÆS MERE

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