Concussion in Children: Return to Activity Instructions

After your child is diagnosed with a concussion, it can be confusing to know what to do next. Below are instructions on how and when your child can safely return to activities. If you have any questions or concerns, ask your care team.

RETURN TO ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Your doctor will make the final decision for when it is safe for your child to return to activities after a head injury. A balanced approach toward activity and recovery is best. Most people, particularly athletes, can begin light exercise within a few days of experiencing a concussion (stage 1-2 below). While mild concussion symptoms are expected, patients should not advance their activity level if symptoms significantly worsen. If your child is unable to perform even light activities 5-7 days after a concussion, call your doctor. While recovering from a concussion, patients should avoid activities that increase the risk of a head strike or another concussion (stage 5 and 6 below). Thinking does not cause damage and is part of your child’s active rehab.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

An initial 24-48 hours of rest is recommended before starting. Then, begin at Stage 1 and advance towards Stage 6 without skipping any stages. If your child experiences any return of concussion symptoms (see list below), go back to the previous stage. There should be a minimum of 24 hours between stages although some athletes, particularly younger children, may spend several days at each stage.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>✓</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Goals and Activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td><strong>Goal</strong>: Reintroduce school and work activities. Daily household activities that do not worsen symptoms.</td>
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<td>Stage 2</td>
<td><strong>Goal</strong>: Increase heart rate. Light aerobic exercise, such as riding a stationary bike, a brisk walk or light jog. No weight or resistance training.</td>
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<td>Stage 3</td>
<td><strong>Goal</strong>: Increase heart rate and add movement. Sport-specific exercise drills, such as moderate intensity aerobic activity, running or skating drills.</td>
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<td>Stage 4</td>
<td><strong>Goal</strong>: Increase conditioning, endurance and thinking with activity. Non-contact drills, including lateral movements, ball, puck or other skill drills without contact. <strong>After completing stage 4, see your doctor for re-evaluation before moving to stage 5.</strong></td>
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<td>Stage 5</td>
<td><strong>Goal</strong>: Demonstrate readiness to play. Contact drills and scrimmaging.</td>
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<td>Stage 6</td>
<td>Full game play</td>
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*The above return to activity progression is adapted from McCrory et al, 2017.

CONCUSSION SYMPTOMS

- Headache
- Dizziness or balance problems
- Increased sensitivity to light or noise
- Nausea or vomiting
- Changes in your vision (seeing blurry or double)
- Concentration or memory problems
- Fatigue (feeling very tired)
- Inability to concentrate well
- Feeling foggy or sluggish
- Feeling more nervous, emotional, irritable or sad than usual
- Not “feeling right”
TIPS TO HELP WITH CONCUSSION RECOVERY:

Sleep: Your child should follow a routine sleep schedule with a similar bedtime and wake time each day. Weekend sleep schedules should be the same as weeknight schedules. Avoid naps unless napping was part of your child’s typical schedule before injury. Naps can cause trouble falling asleep and lead to poor sleep quality that can make recovery longer.

Diet: Your child should have a routine eating schedule, eating at the same time each day. Do not skip meals, especially breakfast, and aim for a well-balanced diet. It is important to keep your child’s brain and body fueled to help with brain recovery.

Hydration: Encourage your child to drink lots of water! Dehydration can lead to fatigue, headaches, dizziness, weakness, and poor performance.

Physical Activity: Your child should get some type of physical activity every day, even if it is just a light walk. Take a break if any symptoms get worse.

Stress: Both physical and emotional stress can cause and/or worsen symptoms. Your child can practice relaxation and meditation with mindfulness apps. Your doctor may provide your child with recommendations for academic accommodations or work restrictions (depending on age) to reduce stress levels while healing.