

ThinkFirst-Sport Smart Concussion Education and Awareness Program

SPORT-RELATED CONCUSSION: GUIDELINES FOR ATHLETES

What is a concussion?

A concussion is a brain injury that cannot be seen on x-rays, CT scans, or MRIs. It affects the way you think and remember things, and can cause a variety of symptoms.

What are the symptoms and signs of concussion?

It is important to know that you don't need to be knocked out (lose consciousness) to have had a concussion. A variety of problems may happen after a concussion, including:

Thinking Problems	Athlete's Complaints	Other Problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does not know time, date, place, period of game, opposing team, score of game• General confusion• Cannot remember things that happened before and after the injury• Knocked out	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Headache• Dizziness• Feels dazed• Feels "dinged" or stunned; "having my bell rung"• Sees stars, flashing lights• Ringing in the ears• Sleepiness• Loss of vision• Sees double or blurry• Stomachache/stomach pain, nausea	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poor coordination or balance• Blank stare/glassy eyed• Vomiting• Slurred speech• Slow to answer questions or follow directions• Easily distracted• Poor concentration• Strange or inappropriate emotions (ie. laughing, crying, getting mad easily)• Not playing as well

What causes a concussion?

Any blow to the head, face or neck, or a blow to the body which causes a sudden jarring of the head may cause a concussion (ie. a ball to the head, being checked into the boards in hockey).

What should you do if you get a concussion?

You should stop playing your sport right away. Continuing to play increases your risk of more severe, longer lasting concussion symptoms, as well as increases your risk of other injury. You should tell your coach, trainer, parent or other responsible person that you are concerned you have had a concussion, and should not return to play that day. You should not be left alone and should be seen by a doctor as soon as possible that day. You should not drive. If someone is knocked out, call an ambulance to take him/her to a hospital immediately. Do not move them or remove athletic equipment such as a helmet until the paramedics arrive.

How long will it take for me to get better?

The signs and symptoms of concussion (see above) often last for 7-10 days but may last much longer. In some cases, athletes may take many weeks or months to heal. Having had previous concussions may increase the chance that you may take longer to heal.

How is a concussion treated?

It is clear that concussion symptoms are made worse by exertion, both physical and cognitive (mental). The most important treatment for a concussion is rest. You should not exercise or do any activities that may make you worse, like driving a car, reading or working/playing on the computer. No snow shoveling, chopping wood, cutting the lawn, moving heavy objects, etc. If mental activities (eg reading, concentrating, using the computer) worsen your symptoms, you may have to stay home from school. You may also have to miss work, depending on what type of job you have, and whether it worsens your symptoms. If you go back to activities before you are completely better, you are more likely to get worse, and to have symptoms last longer. Even though it is very hard for an active person to rest, this is the most important step.

Return to school and work should not occur until you feel better, and school/work activities do not aggravate your symptoms. It is best to return to school/work part-time at first, moving to full time if you have no problems. Once you are completely better at rest, you can start a step-wise increase in activities (see “**When can I return to sport?**”) It is important that you are seen by a doctor before you begin the steps needed to return to activity, to make sure you are completely better. If possible, you should be seen by a doctor with experience in treating concussions.

When can I return to sport?

It is very important that you do not go back to sports if you have any concussion symptoms or signs. Return to sport and activity must follow a step-wise approach:

- 1) No activity, complete rest. Once back to normal at rest, and cleared by a doctor, go to step 2.
- 2) Light exercise such as walking or stationary cycling, for 10-15 minutes.
- 3) Sport specific aerobic activity (ie. skating in hockey, running in soccer), for 20-30 minutes – NO CONTACT.
- 4) “On field” practice such as ball drills, shooting drills, and other activities with NO CONTACT (ie. no checking, no heading the ball, etc.).
- 5) “On field” practice with body contact, *once cleared by a doctor*.
- 6) Game play.

Note: *Each step must take a minimum of one day. If you have any symptoms of a concussion (e.g. headache, feeling sick to your stomach) that come back either during activity, or later that day, you should stop the activity immediately and rest for a minimum of 24 hours. You should be seen by a doctor and cleared again before starting the step wise protocol again. The protocol must be individualized to the athlete, their injury, and the types of activities they are returning to.*

When should I go to the doctor?

Anyone who gets a head injury should be seen by a doctor as soon as possible. You should go back to the doctor IMMEDIATELY if, after being told you have a concussion, you have worsening of symptoms such as:

1. being more confused
2. headache that is getting worse
3. vomiting more than twice
4. not waking up
5. having any trouble walking
6. having a seizure
7. strange behaviour

You should not go back to sport until you have been cleared to do so by a doctor.