

Recovery after a concussion

Information for parents after their child's visit to the Emergency Department

A concussion is a type of brain injury that affects how the brain works. It causes changes in the brain that may not be seen in a CT scan or X-ray.

A concussion may be caused by a blow to the head, face, neck or body. Loss of consciousness may occur.

A concussion may affect balance, reaction time and the way a person thinks and remembers.

Common symptoms

- Sleep disturbances
- Headache
- Nausea and vomiting
- Poor balance or coordination
- Dizziness
- Visual problems
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Mental 'fogginess'
- Difficulty with concentration or memory
- Irritability
- Sadness
- Nervousness



Red flag symptoms

If you notice any of the following symptoms, take your child to a hospital Emergency Department right away:

- Increased drowsiness
- Worsening headache or neck pain
- Repeated vomiting
- Seizures
- Blurred or double vision
- Slurred speech
- Loss of movement
- Changes in behaviour (irritability, agitation or aggression)

Recovery

The brain needs time to heal.

After a concussion, your child needs to rest their body and mind for 24 to 48 hours before beginning any activity.

To help your child recover, we also recommend that your child:

- ✓ Drinks plenty of water to prevent dehydration.
- ✓ Has regular snacks and meals.

The symptoms of concussion usually improve steadily within 30 days. Sometimes, recovery takes longer.

If your child's symptoms do not improve within 4 weeks, see your family doctor or health care provider for assessment and referral to a specialist.

Returning to activities

After a concussion, your child needs to rest their body and mind for 24 to 48 hours before beginning any activity.

If your child has no symptoms after this period of rest, they can gradually return to activities such as learning and playing. Follow the guidelines on the next page. Begin with a gradual return to school. If that goes well, plan a gradual return to sport.

If your child continues to play when they have symptoms, recovery will take longer.

Getting another concussion while the brain is healing can be very dangerous!

If you have any questions about your child's return to activity, talk with your family doctor or health care provider.

Follow these stages to gradually increase your child's activity.
There should be at least 24 hours (or longer) for each stage.
If symptoms worsen, your child should go back to the previous stage.

Gradual return to school

Stage	Activity	Goal
1. Daily activities at home that do not cause symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your child can do their usual daily activities as long as symptoms do not increase. For example: reading, texting, screen time (video games, computer, TV) and playing musical instruments. Start with 5 to 15 minutes at a time and gradually build up. 	Gradual return to usual activities.
2. School activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your child can do homework, reading or other cognitive activities (thinking tasks) outside of the classroom. 	Increase tolerance to thinking tasks.
3. Return to school part-time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your child can gradually begin schoolwork. May need to start with a partial school day or with increased breaks during the day. 	Increase tolerance to schoolwork.
4. Return to school full-time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your child can gradually increase school activities until they can tolerate a full day. 	Return to full school activities and catch up on missed work.

Gradual return to sport

Stage	Activity	Goal
1. Symptom-limited activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Daily activities that do not cause symptoms 	Gradual return to work and school activities.
2. Light aerobic exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walking or stationary cycling at slow to medium pace. No resistance training. 	Increase heart rate.
3. Sport-specific exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Running or skating drills. No head impact activities. 	Add movement.
4. Non-contact training drills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Harder training drills, such as passing drills. May start progressive resistance training. 	Exercise, coordination and increased thinking
5. Full contact practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With doctor's approval, your child can take part in normal training activities. 	Restore confidence. Have coaches assess functional skills.
6. Return to sport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Normal game play. 	

Resources about concussion

Hamilton Helmet Initiative

www.mcmasterchildrenshospital.ca/body.cfm?id=402



Brain Smart Hamilton

www.mcmasterchildrenshospital.ca/body.cfm?id=439



Concussion Ed



- A free mobile app for youth, parents and educators.
- Available in English and French.
- Learn to: Prevent, Recognize, Manage and Track.
- Download at the Apple App Store or Google Play.

Information in this handout is based on this guide for professionals:

McCrory P, Meeuwisse W, Dvořák J, et al. Consensus statement on concussion in sport—the 5th international conference on concussion in sport held in Berlin, October 2016. Br J Sports Med 2017;51:838-847.