

# SPORT-RELATED CONCUSSION

## What is a concussion?

A concussion is a brain injury caused by a blow or force to the head or body that changes the way the brain functions. Most concussions do not involve loss of consciousness or being “knocked out.” Signs and symptoms of a concussion typically develop soon after the injury. Symptoms may evolve and worsen over the first 24 to 48 hours.

## How is a concussion diagnosed?

There is no specific test to diagnose a concussion. A thorough exam that includes an assessment of various brain functions, such as balance, eye movements and coordination, may be used to diagnose a concussion. A computerized neurocognitive test may also be done to assess reaction time, memory and other cognitive functions.

**Imaging studies, such as CT scans, do not show a concussion and are usually not required for diagnosis.**

### Common signs and symptoms of a concussion:

- Headache
- Memory or concentration problems
- Nausea
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Confusion or feeling “in a fog”
- Feeling tired or experiencing sleep problems
- Dizziness or balance problems
- Double or blurred vision
- Emotional, mood and/or behavioral changes

### Immediately seek medical attention at the nearest ER if any of these occur:

- Difference in pupil size between the right and left eye
- Severe or worsening headache
- Trouble walking or talking
- Increasing confusion
- Prolonged loss of consciousness
- Vomiting
- Irregular pulse or breathing rate
- Weak or numb arms or legs
- Sudden change in behavior or thinking
- Seizure



## What should the athlete do after the injury?

- Immediately notify an athletic trainer, coach, school nurse or school administrator of the injury. Communication is key following a concussion!
- Schedule an appointment with a concussion specialist or your primary care physician to assist with concussion treatment, return to school and return to sport.
- Let the athlete sleep. It is not necessary to wake them up every hour.
- Treat symptoms for comfort.
  - Take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) for headaches. Follow the package instructions for dosage and usage.
  - Use an ice pack on the head and neck area, as needed.
- Slowly return to normal daily activities, school and light physical activity, as symptoms allow. Review examples of activities in the *Gradual Return-to-Play Progression* table on the next page.
- Modify or limit activities that increase symptoms, such as video games, attending sporting events and/or concerts.

## What should the athlete **NOT** do after the injury?

- Do **not** drive.
- Do **not** engage in strenuous exercise, lift weights or play sports until symptoms improve and the athlete has been cleared by a healthcare provider.

## What to expect in the days or weeks following a concussion:

- Symptoms gradually improve over time and most young athletes recover within 1 month.
- Symptoms may worsen with:
  - Increased mental activity, such as reading or doing schoolwork.
  - Physical activity.
  - Stimulation, like walking in a crowded hallway or watching a movie.

**When in doubt, sit them out and keep them out.**

# SCHOOL AND SPORTS AFTER A CONCUSSION

## Return to LEARN

Notify the school that your child has a concussion. If available, a school nurse and/or athletic trainer can help with returning to school and sports, as they have additional training in managing concussions. Communication with teachers and working with school staff or counselors is important for a smooth transition back to school.

Schools can provide accommodations and help reduce triggers that might worsen symptoms soon after an injury. This may include decreasing the amount of schoolwork or avoiding crowded hallways. Some students may need to stay home for 1 to 2 days after a concussion. A long absence or removal from school is **not recommended**, as it could worsen symptoms and prolong recovery. As symptoms improve, your child may slowly return to their typical schoolwork and homework.

## Return to SPORTS

Before fully returning to sports, clearance by a physician is strongly recommended and, in some cases, required.

### **Returning to play too soon puts your child at risk for prolonged recovery or a more serious injury.**

Below is an example of a gradual return-to-play progression. Your school or team may have their own protocol, or your physician may provide specific instructions. It is important to follow the recommendations of the athlete's school and medical staff.

## Gradual Return-to-Play Progression

**Follow these guidelines as you implement the six steps below:**

- Do not perform more than one step per day.
- If symptoms worsen significantly during or after completing a step, return to the previous step the next day. Refer to the list of common signs and symptoms on the first page.
- Consult your physician if you are unable to move to the next step due to symptoms.

Step	Examples of Activities	Goal
1	Symptom-limited activity Daily activities, such as walking, simple chores and visiting with friends.	Return gradually to normal home and school activities.
2	Aerobic exercise Stationary bike or walking. No weight lifting or strenuous activity.	Raise heart rate.
3	Sport-specific exercise Running with speed and direction changes.	Increase sport-specific movement and change of direction.
<b>Progress to step 4 when you are symptom-free and have been medically cleared.</b>		
4	Non-contact training High-intensity ball-handling or passing drills with a teammate.	Resume usual exercise intensity, improve coordination and increase decision-making.
5	Full-contact training Normal training activities and scrimmages.	Prepare physically and mentally for game-like situations.
6	Return to sport Normal game play	Tolerate physical and mental challenges of competition.

Scottish Rite for Children Orthopedic & Sports Medicine Center

5700 Dallas Parkway • Frisco, Texas 75034

Main: 469-515-7222 • Sports Clinic: 469-515-7100



*This material is for educational use. Discuss any questions or concerns with your healthcare provider.*

©2026 Scottish Rite for Children

