

Taking time to recover after a concussion

By Jeremy Vandehurst

During the past decade, it's become clear that many young athletes take much longer than 10 days to clinically recover after a concussion. The majority of athletes recover within the first month of injury.




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A concussion can occur when there is a significant blow to the head. Some signs of a more severe concussion are the presence and increased severity of nausea, dizziness, balance problems, sensitivity to light and noise, feeling “slowed down,” pressure in the head, confusion, concentration problems, and difficulty falling asleep.

Many factors can affect recovery time, such as the development of headaches, dizziness, or depression. The strongest and most consistent predictor of slower recovery from a sports-related concussion is the severity of symptoms in the first day, or initial few days, after injury. Conversely, having fewer symptoms the first day after injury usually means recovery

will be faster.



Graduated Return-to-School Strategy

STAGE	AIM	ACTIVITY	GOAL OF EACH STEP
1	Daily activities at home that do not give the child symptoms	Typical activities of the child during the day as long as they do not increase symptoms (e.g., reading, texting, screen time). Start with 5-15 minutes at a time and gradually build up.	Gradual return to typical activities
2	School activities	Homework, reading, or other cognitive activities outside of the classroom.	Increase tolerance to cognitive work
3	Return to school part-time	Gradual introduction of schoolwork. May need to start with a partial school day or with increased breaks during the day.	Increase academic activities
4	Return to school full-time	Gradually progress school activities until a full day can be tolerated.	Return to full academic activities and catch up on missed work

From "Consensus statement on concussion in sport—the 5th international conference on concussion in sport held in Berlin, October 2016." McCrory et al. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 2017.

To date, there isn't enough evidence that prescribing complete rest helps achieve recovery. After a brief rest period for 24–48 hours after injury, patients can become gradually and progressively more active, as long as their activity level doesn't bring on or worsen their symptoms. It is reasonable for athletes to avoid vigorous exertion while they are recovering.

Once concussion-related symptoms have resolved, most athletes can continue to proceed to the next stage if it doesn't cause symptoms to return. Each step generally takes 24 hours. That means many athletes will take a minimum of one week to proceed through the full rehabilitation program. However, the time

frame for returning to sports varies with player age, history, and level of sport, so the program must be individualized.

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