

CONCUSSION

Return to Play Progression

There are five gradual steps to help safely return an athlete to play, adapted from the International Concussion Consensus Guidelines.

Baseline (Step 0): As the baseline step of the Return to Play Progression, the athlete needs to have completed physical and cognitive rest and not be experiencing concussion symptoms for a minimum of 24 hours. *Keep in mind, the younger the athlete, the more conservative the treatment.*

Step 1: Light Aerobic Exercise

The Goal: only to increase an athlete's heart rate.

The Time: 5 to 10 minutes.

The Activities: exercise bike, walking, or light jogging.

Absolutely no weight lifting, jumping or hard running.

Step 2: Moderate Exercise

The Goal: limited body and head movement.

The Time: Reduced from typical routine

The Activities: moderate jogging, brief running, moderate-intensity stationary biking, and moderate-intensity weightlifting

Step 3: Non-contact Exercise

The Goal: more intense but non-contact

The Time: Close to Typical Routine

The Activities: running, high-intensity stationary biking, and the player's regular weightlifting routine and non-contact sport-specific drills. This stage may add some cognitive component to practice in addition to the aerobic and movement components introduced in Steps 1 and 2.

Step 4: Practice

The Goal: Reintegrate in full contact practice.

Step 5: Play

The Goal: Return to competition

It is important to monitor symptoms and cognitive function carefully during each increase of exertion. Athletes should only progress to the next level of exertion if they are not experiencing symptoms at the current level. If symptoms return at any step, an athlete should stop these activities as this may be a sign the athlete is pushing too hard. Only after additional rest, when the athlete is once again not experiencing symptoms for a minimum of 24 hours, should he or she start again at the previous step during which symptoms were experienced.

The Return to Play Progression process is best conducted through a team approach and by a health professional who knows the athlete's physical abilities and endurance. By gauging the athlete's performance on each individual step, a health care professional will be able to determine how far to progress the athlete on a given day. In some cases, the athlete may be able to work through one step in a single day, while in other cases it may take several days to work through an individual step. It may take several weeks to months to work through the entire 5-step progression. Many local schools are using a computer based testing program (ImPACT) to help determine when an athlete may return to play. This program measures verbal and visual memory as well as processing speed and reaction time.

Remember, while most athletes will recover quickly and fully following a concussion, some will have symptoms for weeks or longer. Health care professionals should consider referral to a concussion specialist if:

1. the symptoms worsen at any time,
2. symptoms have not gone away after 10-14 days, or
3. the patient has a history of multiple concussions or risk factors for prolonged recovery. This may include a history of migraines, depression, mood disorders, or anxiety, as well as developmental disorders such as learning disabilities and ADHD.

If your child is not improving, you may wish to consult a physician who specializes in concussions.

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