

# Recovering from concussion

## Follow these guidelines for a safe recovery

A concussion is a brain injury caused by an impact to the head. To heal, you must rest your mind and your body. It is important that you rest and return slowly to your activities.

Most people with a concussion recover fully, usually within a few days. For others, it can take several weeks or longer. Below is a series of steps to guide your recovery.

*Note: These are general guidelines. Because each person and each injury is different, you should talk with your doctor about your plan to get back to your normal activities.*

## About symptoms

While recovering, you may feel signs of the injury — called symptoms — either right away or hours or days after the injury; sometimes you feel them only when you return to more activity. Here are some possible symptoms:

| <b>Mental</b>  | <b>Physical</b>   |
|--|---|
| Difficulty thinking clearly, concentrating, remembering new things | Headache, blurry vision, nausea, dizziness, tiredness, sensitivity to light or noise, ringing in ears |
| <b>Emotional</b>   | <b>Sleep</b>  |
| Feeling irritable, sad, emotional, anxious                         | Sleeping more or less than usual, trouble falling asleep  |

If you are still feeling symptoms after a few weeks, talk with your doctor about seeing a concussion specialist such as a physical, occupational or speech therapist, a rehabilitation medicine physician (physiatrist), or a neuropsychologist.

If you feel serious symptoms (see box on next page), call 911.

Note that alcohol and some drugs can have a stronger effect during your recovery from concussion. Use caution and consult your medical provider if you have questions or experience any unusual reactions.

## Returning to mental effort

The goal is to increase activity gradually: rest and then make slow increases in your level of mental activity to the point that it doesn't cause symptoms.

### Step 1: Rest the mind.

- Right after the injury, relax as much as you can to let your body and brain begin healing. Avoid loud, stimulating environments.

### Step 2: Try light mental effort.

- As you feel better, slowly add activities such as watching TV, listening to audiobooks and cooking. Stop if you start to feel worse.
- At first, you may only be able to do five to 15 minutes of mental effort at a time. If the symptoms don't get worse, you can do the activity for a longer time.

### Step 3: Do active mental tasks.

When you can do light mental activity, try some home mental activities that you are accustomed to, which may include computer use, reading or problem-solving games/activities for up to 30 minutes; build from there.

*(continued)*

**Step 4:** Return to work with mental effort.

- When you can do one or two hours of active mental tasks at home for one or two days, return to a half day of mentally active work. Or, if you are able to do three to four hours of active mental tasks, try a full day of work. You may also try working every other day.
- If you return to work and start feeling worse, you should let someone know and take a break in a quiet area. When symptoms go away, you may return to activities. If the symptoms don't go away, you should seek medical advice.

**Returning to exercise and physical effort**

The goal is to improve gradually: rest and then make slow increases in activity as long as it doesn't cause symptoms.

**Step 1:** Rest the body.

- At first, rest your body until you feel better and the signs of the injury improve.
- Don't stay in bed; try light walking for up to 15 minutes. Do not break a sweat or do any activity that causes the symptoms to return.

**Step 2:** Try light exercise.

- As soon as you are not having symptoms with light activities, try exercises such as fast walking or stationary biking, as long as the symptoms don't return. No weightlifting.

**Step 3:** Start with mild exercise, light duty work, sport-specific exercise.

- Once you can do light exercise and tolerate a full day of regular non-work activities, try returning to short periods of light duty at work.
- Once you can do light exercise and return to light duty at work, start doing moderate exercise: jogging, short periods of running, stationary biking, throwing a baseball or kicking a soccer ball. Do no activities in which your head could get hit.

**Step 4:** Begin hard exercise, regular work duties, but no contact sports.

- Next, you can start harder exercises: running, hard stationary biking, weightlifting and drills. Still no contact sports; it is crucial to avoid hitting your head again.

**Step 5:** Return to play, full physical work.

- At this point, ask your provider to allow you to return to full physical work duties and full contact sports.

**For questions or an appointment with a concussion specialist:**

**Call Legacy Concussion Program, 503-672-6005**

**Call 911 if you have any of these symptoms**

- Seizures (twitching or jerking movements; stiffness)
- Weakness or tingling in the arms or legs
- Cannot recognize people or places
- Confused, restless or agitated
- Impaired consciousness
- Hard to stir or unable to awaken
- Repeated throwing up
- Slurred speech
- Bloody or clear fluid from the nose or ears

