

Concussion Guidelines

Following a Diagnosis

What is a concussion?

A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury that can affect how your brain works. Concussions may happen because of a hit to the head, face, neck or somewhere else on the body. When such a hit takes place, the brain twists or moves back and forth inside the skull. If this sudden movement is hard enough, the brain can become injured and can cause a variety of signs and symptoms.

When should I suspect a concussion?

A concussion can only be diagnosed by a physician or nurse practitioner. However, **ANYONE** may suspect a concussion if an injured person reports **ANY** symptom or shows **ANY** signs after sustaining a hit to the head or body. For help in the identification of a suspected concussion, it is recommended that you use a concussion recognition tool such as the **Concussion Recognition Tool 5 (CRT5)** or the **Tool to Identify a Suspected Concussion**.

What should I do once I return home from the hospital?

Rest/Sleeping



Concussion symptoms may get worse with excessive physical and mental exertion. This is why the most important initial treatment for a concussion is **REST**. The concussed person should not exercise, go to work or do any activities that may make their symptoms worse, like riding a bike, texting or watching television for at least 24 hours. When symptoms start to improve or after resting for 2 days max, the person may begin symptom limited activity.

Sleep is also important to the healing process, especially soon after the injury. It is recommended that any concussed person follow a good routine for sleep (Sleep Hygiene) in order to address this concern.

Surveillance



Concussion signs and symptoms may only appear or worsen hours or days after the injury. It is recommended that someone monitor the concussed person for the first 24 to 48 hours following the incident in order to identify any new or worsening signs and symptoms.

It is not necessary to wake a person up periodically following a concussion. Interrupting this rest can make the recovery more difficult. However, if you have any concerns about the person's breathing or how they are sleeping, you may wake them up. Otherwise, you should let them sleep.

Alcohol/Drugs



Do not use any recreational drugs. Alcohol, tobacco, caffeine and other stimulant use should also be avoided. Those substances may worsen signs and symptoms of concussion and interfere with the recovery process. In addition, you should not take any medications unless advised by your primary care provider.

Consulting your primary care provider



It is recommended that you contact your primary care provider (family physician or nurse practitioner) as soon as possible after receiving a concussion diagnosis in order to schedule a follow-up appointment. Follow their guidelines and report any new or ongoing symptoms during your conversation.

A concussed person should not drive or operate machinery without a medical clearance from their primary care provider.

When should I go back to seek immediate medical attention?

Sometimes serious problems may develop hours or days after a head injury. If you identify **ANY** new or worsening concussion signs or symptoms that are found in the list below, seek medical attention **IMMEDIATELY**.

Possible signs observed

- ☐ Vomiting
- ☐ Seizure or convulsion
- ☐ Loss of consciousness
- ☐ Deteriorating conscious state
- ☐ Increasing restlessness, agitation or combativeness

Possible symptoms reported

- ☐ Double vision
- ☐ Neck pain or tenderness
- ☐ Severe or increasing headache
- ☐ Weakness or tingling/burning in arms or legs

RED FLAGS

When can I return to regular activities?

Most people will fully recover following a concussion. However, it's important to remember that the necessary recovery time following a concussion is different for each person and can vary from days to weeks to months. Typically, concussion symptoms can last up to 4 weeks in youth under the age of 18 years old and 2 weeks in adults. Individuals may also need a longer time to proceed through each step of their progressive and individualized recovery strategy due to "modifying factors" of clinical recovery such as:

- Having had multiple concussions in the past
- Severity of initial symptoms in the first days
- History of migraine headaches

If a person experiences any ongoing concussion symptoms (i.e., lasting longer than four weeks if under 18 or lasting longer than two weeks if 18 or older), it is recommended that they be referred to a primary care provider with expertise in the management of concussion or a multidisciplinary team of experienced healthcare professionals.

How can I help with my return to daily activity?

People should gradually return to usual activities by following a stepwise **Return to Daily Activities Strategy**. This is especially important to progressively build tolerance to the physical and cognitive demands of daily life. In addition, the use of accommodations such as wearing sunglasses or using noise-cancelling earplugs may be necessary depending both on the type of concussion symptoms they experience, and the type of activities undertaken.

How can I help with efforts to return to work?

Returning to work after a concussion injury can be challenging. However, individuals are encouraged to make efforts towards their safe return to work as early as possible by following a stepwise **Return to Work Strategy**. For some workers, modifications to job duties or hours of work may be necessary depending both on the type of concussion symptoms they experience and the nature of the individual's work. Prior to returning to work, individuals should determine which accommodations are required to help them tolerate their concussion symptoms at the workplace.

When can I return to my usual learning activities?

A worker who needs to spend part of their day studying should focus on returning to their usual ability to complete learning activities before concentrating on efforts to return to a pre-injury workplace performance level, if economically feasible. For those individuals, it is recommended to use the **Return-to-School Strategy** to help guide their return to cognitive exertion.

When can I return-to-sport/physical activity?

It's important to remember that concussion symptoms may get worse with excessive physical and mental exertion. It is recommended that you follow a healthcare provider's advice for a progressive and gradual return to physical activities whether at the workplace, on the playing field or elsewhere.

The **Return-to-Sport/Physical Activity Strategy** provides information on each of the stages that are required for a gradual return to regular physical activities.

The NB Trauma Program, and our injury prevention partners, would like to encourage you to learn more about how to avoid concussions in addition to knowing how to identify and manage concussion signs and symptoms through each stage of the recovery process.

Return to Daily Activities

Each stage must take a minimum of 24 hours, but could last longer depending on the individual and their specific situation. If new or worsening symptoms are experienced at any stage, the person must go back to the previous stage for at least 24 hours. The individual may need to move back a stage more than once during the recovery process.

For more information about the recommended sequence for returning activities after a concussion, please refer to the website of the document.

Both Return-to-School and Return-to-Sport/Physical Activity Strategies can be done in parallel.

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REST	STAGE A	STAGE B	STAGE C	STAGE D	STAGE E	STAGE F
Return to School	Return to Work	Return to School	Return to Work	Return to School	Return to Work	Return to School
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Return to Work

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For more information about the **Return to Daily Activities, Return to Work, Return to School and Return to Sport/Physical Activity Strategies**, please consult our available concussion resources by visiting us at www.NBTrauma.ca.