

CONCUSSION GUIDELINES FOR THE ATHLETE



NB Trauma Program
Programme de
traumatologie du NB

Halifax Health Network Réseau de santé Halifax Vitalité Health Network Réseau de santé Vitalité Ambulance NB New Brunswick Department of Health Ministère de la santé du Nouveau-Brunswick

www.nbtrauma.ca

WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a brain injury that cannot be seen on routine x-rays, CT scans, or MRIs. It affects the way a person may think and remember things for a short time, and can cause a variety of symptoms.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS AND SIGNS OF CONCUSSION?

YOU DON'T NEED TO BE KNOCKED OUT (LOSE CONSCIOUSNESS) TO HAVE HAD A CONCUSSION.

THINKING PROBLEMS	ATHLETE'S COMPLAINTS	OTHER PROBLEMS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not know time, date, place, period of game, opposing team, score of game General confusion Cannot remember things that happened before and after the injury Knocked out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Headache Dizziness Feels dazed Feels "dinged" or stunned; "having my bell rung" Sees stars, flashing lights Ringing in the ears Sleepiness Loss of vision Sees double or blurry Stomachache, stomach pain, nausea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor coordination or balance Blank stare/glassy eyed Vomiting Slurred speech Slow to answer questions or follow directions Easily distracted Poor concentration Strange or inappropriate emotions (ie. laughing, crying, getting mad easily) Not playing as well

WHAT CAUSES A CONCUSSION?

Any blow to the head, face or neck, or a blow to the body which causes a sudden jarring of the head may cause a concussion (ie. a ball to the head, being checked into the boards in hockey).

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU GET A CONCUSSION?

YOU SHOULD STOP PLAYING THE SPORT RIGHT AWAY. Continuing to play increases your risk of more severe, longer lasting concussion symptoms, as well as increases your risk of other injury. You should tell your coach, trainer, parent or other responsible person that you are concerned you have had a concussion, and should not return to play that day. You should not be left alone and should be seen by a doctor as soon as possible that day. You should not drive. If someone is knocked out, call an ambulance to take them to a hospital immediately. Do not move them or remove athletic equipment such as a helmet until the paramedics arrive.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO GET BETTER?

The signs and symptoms of a concussion often last for 7-10 days but may last much longer. In some cases, athletes may take many weeks or months to heal. Having had previous concussions may increase the chance that a person may take longer to heal.

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HOW IS A CONCUSSION TREATED?

CONCUSSION SYMPTOMS ARE MADE WORSE BY EXERTION, BOTH PHYSICAL AND MENTAL. THE MOST IMPORTANT TREATMENT FOR A CONCUSSION IS REST. You should not exercise or do any activities that may make you worse, like driving a car, reading, working on the computer or playing video games. No snow shoveling, cutting the lawn, moving heavy objects, etc. If mental activities (eg: reading, concentrating, using the computer) worsen your symptoms, you may have to stay home from school. You may also have to miss work, depending on what type of job you have, and whether it worsens your symptoms. If you go back to activities before you are completely better, you are more likely to get worse, and to have symptoms last longer. Even though it is very hard for an active person to rest, this is the most important step.

Return to school should not happen until you feel better, and these activities do not aggravate your symptoms. It is best to return to school part-time at first, moving to full time if you have no problems. Once you are completely better at rest, you can start a step-wise increase in activities (see "When can I return to sport?") It is important that you are seen by a doctor before you begin the steps needed to return to activity, to make sure you are completely better. If possible, you should be seen by a doctor with experience in treating concussions.

WHEN SHOULD I GO TO THE DOCTOR?

Anyone who gets a head injury should be seen by a doctor as soon as possible. You should go back to the doctor IMMEDIATELY if, after being told you have a concussion, you have worsening of symptoms like:

1. being more confused
2. headache that is getting worse
3. vomiting more than twice
4. not waking up
5. having any trouble walking
6. having a seizure
7. strange behaviour

WHEN CAN I RETURN TO SPORT?

It is very important that you do not go back to sports if you have any concussion symptoms or signs. Return to sport and activity must follow a step-wise approach:

- STEP 1) No activity, complete rest. Once back to normal and cleared by a doctor, go to step 2.**
- STEP 2) Light exercise such as walking or stationary cycling, for 10-15 minutes.**
- STEP 3) Sport specific aerobic activity (ie. skating in hockey, running in soccer), for 20-30 minutes. NO CONTACT.**
- STEP 4) "On field" practice such as ball drills, shooting drills, and other activities with NO CONTACT (ie. no checking, no heading the ball, etc.).**
- STEP 5) "On field" practice with body contact, once cleared by a doctor.**
- STEP 6) Game play.**

NOTE: EACH STEP MUST TAKE A MINIMUM OF ONE DAY. If you have any symptoms of a concussion (e.g. headache, feeling sick to his/her stomach) that come back either with activity, or later that day, stop the activity immediately and rest until symptoms resolve, for a minimum of 24 hours. See a doctor and be cleared before starting the step wise protocol again.

YOU SHOULD NOT GO BACK TO SPORT UNTIL YOU HAVE BEEN CLEARED TO DO SO BY A DOCTOR.