



Return to Learn After a Concussion

How can a concussion affect a student?

While every student is different, a concussion can impact a student's ability to concentrate, learn and participate in a school setting. Activities that require concentration can cause an increase or recurrence of concussion symptoms.

What signs can school professionals look for when students return to school after a concussion?

- Problems with concentration/attention
- Difficulty remembering
- Difficulty learning new concepts
- Requiring longer time to complete tasks
- Difficulty organizing tasks
- Challenges with multi-step problems
- Difficulty multi-tasking
- Inappropriate behavior during class
- Increased irritability
- Decreased ability to cope
- Increased emotionality
- Changes in personality
- Challenges with school environment stimuli (light, noise, crowds, etc.)
- Physical symptoms (i.e. headaches, nausea, dizziness, fatigue), especially during concentration

When should a student/athlete return to school?

Since every student/athlete's injury and recovery is unique, each return to school plan is individualized. To ensure the best and speediest recovery, a gradual return to learn program is essential. Jumping right back into a regular school schedule can increase symptoms and slow recovery. The key to success is to follow a step-wise approach with provision of the appropriate accommodations. The steps are listed below, but each student/athlete will progress through these steps at their own rate as directed by the Sports Concussion Program Medical Team.

Why is cognitive rest important?

Rest (both physical and cognitive) is the KEY to brain recovery. When a concussion occurs, the brain's energy is depleted; mental exertion requires brain energy and causes further energy depletion often leading to recurrent/increased concussion-related symptoms. Therefore, the goal of cognitive rest is to minimize mental activity to a level that does not worsen concussion-related symptoms and allows the brain to heal.

How can school staff address a student's needs after a concussion?

Evaluate a student's individual post-concussion symptom-profile compared to their pre-concussion performance with the following considerations:

Are some classes, subjects or tasks more difficult than others?

Is there a specific time frame or time of day when the student demonstrates poor focus, fatigue, or increased symptoms?

STEPS TO A SPEEDY RECOVERY AFTER A CONCUSSION

Step 1: Complete Cognitive (thinking, processing) REST

- Home: No school or homework
- No screen time: no computer, no texting, no video games, and possibly no TV if it triggers symptoms or makes symptoms worse.
- Initial “activities”: Watching “light” TV (i.e., sitcoms, but no action movies or emotionally-invested sports), listening to audio books or mellow music, drawing and cooking.

Step 2: Light Cognitive Activity

- Home: No school
- No screen time: no computer, no texting, no video games, and possibly no TV if it triggers symptoms or makes symptoms worse.
- As symptoms decrease, slowly reintroduce “light cognitive activity,” (i.e., reading a magazine or “easy” book). Then try 5-10 minutes of “easy” homework and increase as able (30 minute max).
- If able to do 1-2 hours of homework for 1-2 days without recurrence/worsening of symptoms, then progress to step 3.

Step 3: School - Part time

- School: Shortened day, late start, begin with 1-2 classes, built-in breaks
- If symptoms develop at school, take a break in a quiet, supervised area until symptoms stop. If symptoms persist/recur, go home, rest and return to Step 1.
- Maximum accommodations: Avoid screen time, no testing, modify rather than postpone academics, extra time/help with assignments, minimize school stimuli
- Do not continue activities that cause or worsen symptoms.
- DO’s: Start with easy subjects; Set a timer for short intervals.
- DON’T: Start with the hardest subjects; Don’t push through symptoms.

Step 4: School - Part time

- School: Increasing attendance, continued late start and built-in breaks as needed
- Continue activity in short bursts (up to 30 minutes) and then gradually increase to longer time periods, as tolerated.
- Moderate accommodations: No testing, modify rather than postpone academics, continued support, minimize school stimuli.

Step 5: School - Full time

- School: Full attendance
- Minimal accommodations: Continued support in academically challenging subjects, begin routine testing (maximum 1 test/day); No make-up exams until several days after tolerating full school day.

Step 6: School - Full time

- School: Full attendance
- No accommodations: Full academics; maintain normal coursework; allow time to complete any required make up work.

DO’s and DON’Ts After a Concussion

DO’s	DON’Ts
Rest: Naps, Early bedtimes, Sleep in	Stay up late
Keep well-hydrated and eat a healthy diet	Attend large social gatherings, including athletic events
Enjoy quiet activities such as cooking, arts and crafts, mellow music, “light” tv	Use electronic devices: Minimal to no texting, email, computer time, phone calls, loud music/TV/movies and video games
Break schoolwork items into short, easy steps	Get stressed about catching up at school