

Concussion Guide for PARENTS & CAREGIVERS



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 child may think and remember things and can cause a variety of symptoms.



What are the signs and symptoms of a concussion?

Your child or athlete in your care does not need to be knocked out (lose consciousness) to have had a concussion. Your child/athlete in your care might experience one or more of the following:

Thinking Problems	Athlete's Complaints	Other Problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does not know where they are, if it's before or after lunch, if their team won the last game• General confusion• Cannot remember things that happened before and after the injury	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Headache• Dizziness• Feeling dazed• They "don't feel right"• Bothered by light• Bothered by noise/sound• Sleepiness/low energy• Loss of vision• Seeing double or blurry vision• Stomachache, stomach pain, nausea	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poor co-ordination or balance• Blank or vacant stare• Vomiting• Slurred speech• Slow to answer questions or follow directions• Easily distracted or more than normal• Poor concentration• Irritability or unusual emotions• Not playing as well

Get medical help immediately if your child/athlete in your care has any "red flag" symptoms such as neck pain, repeated vomiting, growing confusion, seizures, and weakness or tingling in their arms or legs. These may be signs of a more serious injury.

Individuals with intellectual disabilities may take more time to verbalize symptoms of a concussion or may communicate non-verbally. If appropriate, you can use non-verbal communication strategies, such as asking the individual to point to anywhere that hurts.

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 (e.g., a ball to the head, colliding with another person, fall to the ground).

What should I do if I suspect my child/athlete in my care has a concussion?

In all suspected cases of concussion, your child should stop the activity right away. Continuing increases their risk of more severe, longer-lasting concussion symptoms, as well as increases their risk of other injury.

The Concussion Recognition Tool can be used by anyone to help recognize the signs and symptoms of a possible concussion.

Your child/athlete in your care should not be left alone and should be seen by a doctor as soon as possible that day.

If your child/athlete in your care loses consciousness, call an ambulance to take them to the hospital right away. Do not move your child/athlete in your care or remove any equipment such as a helmet.

Your child/athlete in your care should not return to play the same day.

How long before my child/athlete in my care gets better?

The signs and symptoms of a concussion often last for one to four weeks but may last longer. In some cases, it may take many weeks or months to heal. If your child/athlete in your care has had a concussion before, they may take longer to heal.

If your child's/athlete in your care's symptoms are persistent (i.e., last longer than four weeks in youth under 18 years old), they should be referred to a healthcare professional who is an expert in the management of concussion.

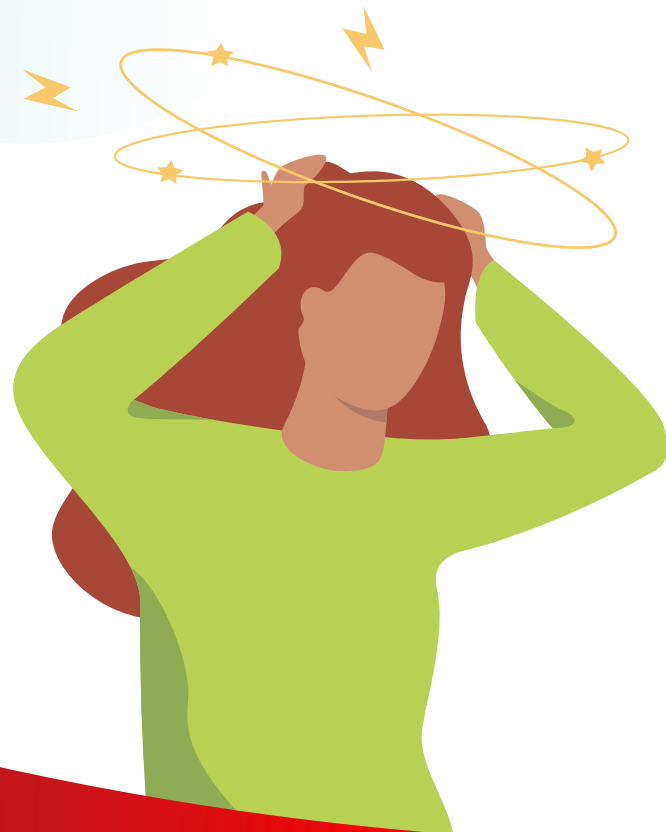


How is concussion treated?

After an initial short period of rest (24 to 48 hours), light cognitive and physical activity can begin, as long as these don't worsen symptoms. A medical doctor, preferably one with experience managing concussions, should be consulted before beginning step-wise Return-to-Activities and Return-to-Sport Strategies.

As your child/athlete in your care is recovering from concussion, they should not do any activities that may make their symptoms worse. This might mean limiting activities such as riding their bike, reading, working on the computer or playing video games.

Recovering from concussion is a process that takes patience. If your child/athlete in your care goes back to activities before they are ready, it is likely to make their symptoms worse, and their recovery might take longer.



When should my child/athlete in my care go to the doctor?

Anyone with a possible head injury should be seen by a doctor as soon as possible. If your child/athlete in your care is diagnosed with a concussion, the doctor should schedule a follow-up visit within the next one to two weeks.

Take your child/athlete in your care back to the doctor immediately if, after being told they have a concussion, they have worsening symptoms, such as:

- being more confused
- headache that is getting worse
- vomiting more than twice
- not waking up
- having any trouble walking
- having a seizure
- strange behaviour

When can my child/athlete in my care return to activities?

Your child/athlete in your care may find it hard to concentrate in class or at work, may get a worse headache, or feel sick to their stomach. Your child/athlete in your care should stay home from school or work if being there makes their symptoms worse. Once they feel better, they can try going back to school or work part time to start (i.e., for half days) and if they are OK with that, then they can go back full time.

Each concussion is unique, so your child/athlete in your care may progress at a different rate than others.

The Return-to-Activities Strategy provides information on the stages of returning to the classroom, work and other daily activities. Return to school or work must come before full return to sport.

When can my child/athlete in my care return to sport and physical activity?

It is very important that your child/athlete in your care does not go back to full participation in sport if they have any concussion signs or symptoms. Return to sport and physical activity must follow a step-wise approach.

In this approach:

- Each stage is at least 24 hours.
- Your child moves on to the next stage when they can tolerate activities without new or worsening symptoms.
- If any of your child's symptoms worsen, they should stop and go back to the previous stage for at least 24 hours.

Stage 1: After an initial 24 to 48 hours of rest, light cognitive and physical activity can begin, as long as these don't worsen symptoms. Your child/athlete in your care can start with daily activities such as moving around the home and simple chores, such as making their bed.

Stage 2: Light aerobic activity such as walking or stationary cycling at slow to medium pace, for 15 to 20 minutes. Your child/athlete in your care shouldn't do any heavy lifting or resistance training (e.g., bodyweight exercises, weight training).

Stage 3: Individual sport-specific exercise with no risk of contact for 20 to 30 minutes. Your child/athlete in your care can participate in simple, individual activities, such as going for a walk or shooting a basketball. Your child/athlete in your care shouldn't do any resistance training.

Stage 4: Non-contact training drills (practice without heading the ball, etc.). Add in longer and more challenging physical activity. Start to add in resistance training (if appropriate for your child/athlete in your care).

Get clearance from a doctor before moving on to Stages 5 and 6.

Stage 5: Participate in practice with contact, if your child/athlete in your care plays a contact sport.

Stage 6: Full game play or competition.

The Return-to-Sport Strategy provides more information on the stages of returning to sport.

Your child/athlete in your care should never return to sport until cleared by a doctor!

Returning too soon before full recovery from concussion puts your child/athlete in your care at higher risk of sustaining another concussion, with symptoms that may be more severe and last longer.

Additional Resources

Available at www.specialolympics.ca/safesport:

- Concussion Policy
- Pan-Canadian Protocols
- Recognition Tool
- Athlete Guidelines & Educational Video
- Making Headway in Special Olympics eLearning (Coaching Association of Canada)

Parachute Resources available at Concussion - Parachute (parachutecanada.org)