

RETURN TO PLAY PROTOCOL

(excerpt from document prepared by Dr. J. Scott Delaney, 2012)

When should I return to play?

A concussed athlete will be removed from play immediately and should be assessed by healthcare professional. Under NO circumstances should a player be returned to competition when concussed. Because symptoms may worsen later that night and next day, you should not return to the current game or practice. When concussed, your decision-making about this may not reflect the best judgment! Post-concussive symptoms may increase with increases in activity so it is important that return to play is gradual.

Return to Play Steps

The return to play process is gradual, and begins after the healthcare professional has given the player clearance to return to activity. These steps should only be started after the athlete has returned to full school or work. If any symptoms/signs return during this process, the player should return to the previous step where he or she had no symptoms and may need to be re-evaluated by a healthcare professional. No return to play if any symptoms or signs persist. Remember, symptoms may return later that day or the next, not necessarily when exercising. These steps are used as a general guideline and may be expanded in certain cases.

Step 1. No activity, only complete rest. Proceed to step 2 only when symptoms are gone.

Step 2. Light aerobic exercise, such as walking or stationary cycling. Monitor for symptoms and signs. No resistance training or weight lifting. Progress to increased intensity and duration as tolerated (i.e. no symptoms next day).

Step 3. Sport specific activities and training (e.g. skating).

Step 4. Drills without body contact. May add light resistance training at **Step 3** or **4** and progress to heavier weights. The time needed to progress from non-contact to contact exercise will vary with the severity of the concussion and the player.

Go to **Step 5** after medical clearance.

Step 5. Begin drills with body contact.

Step 6. Game play.

****Note:** Players should proceed through return to play steps only when they do not experience symptoms or signs. *Remember these are steps, not days!* It may take more than one day to progress from one step to the next especially if symptoms have lasted for a while. If symptoms or signs return, the player should return to the previous step, and possibly be re-evaluated by a physician.

It is important to realize that the return to play steps are not intended to recondition the athlete, but are being used to gauge the athlete's recovery and ability to return to full activity or competition. If an athlete has symptoms during the return to play steps, it indicates that he or she is not fully recovered and that their threshold for another concussion is lower than normal. This means that the athlete could suffer another, possibly more severe concussion with much less force than the original injury.

Never return to play if symptoms persist!