

# Guidelines for Post-concussion Return to Play

## Introduction

The Return to Activity Plan must be coordinated between the treating physician and the Certified Athletic Trainer.

We are now recognizing the importance of decreasing the amount of stimuli the brain must process following a concussion. It is essential that a student athlete who has suffered a concussion “rest” his or her brain in the days following the injury. It is especially important to avoid intense stimuli like loud noises and bright or flashing lights. Thus, concussed athletes should spend the days following a concussion staying away from activities such as attending sporting events, dances, and limit watching TV, playing video games, texting, or using the computer.

Concussed athletes with persistent symptoms, particularly symptoms worsened by auditory and/or visual stimuli, should be kept from returning to school or have a modified school schedule early on after a concussion. The importance of cognitive rest must be stressed to the athlete, parents and teachers.

## Post-concussion Symptoms

In order to begin the Return to Activity Plan the student athlete must have no post-concussion symptoms and passed the cognitive assessment and be cleared by a health care professional trained in concussion management.

Post concussion symptoms include:

Headache	Lack of energy, tiredness
Fogginess	Dizziness, poor balance, lightheaded
Difficulty concentrating	Blurred vision
Easily confused	Sensitive to light and sounds
Slowed thought processes	Poor sleep
Difficulty with memory	Mood changes---irritable, anxious or tearful
Nausea	

## Seven Steps to a Safe Return to Activity

Step 1. Complete cognitive rest. This may include staying home from school or limiting school hours (and studying) for several days, which would be determined by a physician, or certified athletic trainer and supported by school administration. Activities requiring concentration and attention may worsen symptoms and delay recovery.

Step 2. Return to school full-time.

Steps 3-7 will be supervised by the Certified Athletic Trainer at the high school

Step 3. Light exercise. This step cannot begin until athlete is cleared by the treating physician for further activity. At this point the student athlete may begin walking or riding a stationary bike.

Step 4. Running in the gym or on the field. No helmet or other equipment.

Step 5. Non-contact training drills in full equipment. Weight training can begin.

Step 6. Full contact practice or training.

Step 7. Play in game.

The student-athlete may spend 1 to 2 days at each step before advancing to the next step. If post concussion signs or symptoms occur at any step, activity must stop.

# HEADS+UP CONCUSSION IN HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

A FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS

## What is a concussion?

A concussion is a brain injury. Concussions are caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body. Even a “ding,” “getting your bell rung,” or what seems to be a mild bump or blow to the head can be serious.

## What are the signs and symptoms?

You can't see a concussion. Signs and symptoms of concussion can show up right after the injury or may not appear or be noticed until days after the injury. If your teen reports *one or more* symptoms of concussion listed below, or if you notice the symptoms yourself, keep your teen out of play and seek medical attention right away.

Signs Observed by Parents or Guardians	Symptoms Reported by Athlete
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appears dazed or stunned</li> <li>• Is confused about assignment or position</li> <li>• Forgets an instruction</li> <li>• Is unsure of game, score, or opponent</li> <li>• Moves clumsily</li> <li>• Answers questions slowly</li> <li>• Loses consciousness (<i>even briefly</i>)</li> <li>• Shows mood, behavior, or personality changes</li> <li>• Can't recall events <i>prior</i> to hit or fall</li> <li>• Can't recall events <i>after</i> hit or fall</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headache or “pressure” in head</li> <li>• Nausea or vomiting</li> <li>• Balance problems or dizziness</li> <li>• Double or blurry vision</li> <li>• Sensitivity to light or noise</li> <li>• Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy</li> <li>• Concentration or memory problems</li> <li>• Confusion</li> <li>• Just not “feeling right” or is “feeling down”</li> </ul>

## How can you help your teen prevent a concussion?

Every sport is different, but there are steps your teens can take to protect themselves from concussion and other injuries.

- Make sure they wear the right protective equipment for their activity. It should fit properly, be well maintained, and be worn consistently and correctly.

- Ensure that they follow their coaches' rules for safety and the rules of the sport.
- Encourage them to practice good sportsmanship at all times.

## What should you do if you think your teen has a concussion?

- 1. Keep your teen out of play.** If your teen has a concussion, her/his brain needs time to heal. Don't let your teen return to play the day of the injury and until a health care professional, experienced in evaluating for concussion, says your teen is symptom-free and it's OK to return to play. A repeat concussion that occurs before the brain recovers from the first—usually within a short period of time (hours, days, or weeks)—can slow recovery or increase the likelihood of having long-term problems. In rare cases, repeat concussions can result in edema (brain swelling), permanent brain damage, and even death.
- 2. Seek medical attention right away.** A health care professional experienced in evaluating for concussion will be able to decide how serious the concussion is and when it is safe for your teen to return to sports.
- 3. Teach your teen that it's not smart to play with a concussion.** Rest is key after a concussion. Sometimes athletes wrongly believe that it shows strength and courage to play injured. Discourage others from pressuring injured athletes to play. Don't let your teen convince you that s/he's “just fine.”
- 4. Tell all of your teen's coaches and the student's school nurse about ANY concussion.** Coaches, school nurses, and other school staff should know if your teen has ever had a concussion. Your teen may need to limit activities while s/he is recovering from a concussion. Things such as studying, driving, working on a computer, playing video games, or exercising may cause concussion symptoms to reappear or get worse. Talk to your health care professional, as well as your teen's coaches, school nurse, and teachers. If needed, they can help adjust your teen's school activities during her/his recovery.

## If you think your teen has a concussion:

Don't assess it yourself. Take him/her out of play. Seek the advice of a health care professional.

**It's better to miss one game than the whole season.**

For more information and to order additional materials *free-of-charge*, visit: [www.cdc.gov/Concussion](http://www.cdc.gov/Concussion).

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

