

**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'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?

**Are there any long-term concerns after a concussion?**

A common concern after a head injury is chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a degenerative brain disease found in individuals with a history of repetitive brain trauma. Current literature suggests that CTE is not caused by any single injury, but rather by years of repetitive brain trauma. Symptoms may include mood changes and cognitive challenges, which may progress over time. It can only be diagnosed after death through brain tissue analysis, making treatment difficult. Treatment will usually involve therapy to target triggers of symptoms. However, currently further research is needed to better understand this disease process.

**STEPS TO A SPEEDY RECOVERY AFTER A CONCUSSION**

**Step 1: Complete Cognitive (thinking, processing) REST**

- No screen time: no computer, no texting, no video games, and possibly no TV if it triggers symptoms or makes symptoms worse.
- Initially, this may include staying home from school and/or not doing homework.
- Initial “activities may include watching “light” TV (e.g., sitcoms, but no action movies or emotionally-invested sports), listening to audio books or mellow music, drawing and cooking. Stop if symptoms increase.
- As symptoms decrease, slowly reintroduce “light cognitive activity,” such as reading a magazine or “easy” book.

**Step 2: Light Cognitive Activity**

- Attempt light activities (see above) that do not cause or worsen symptoms.
- Initially, try 5-10 minutes of light reading. Stop if symptoms increase.
- Increase the length of cognitive activity as long as symptoms don’t worsen significantly or symptoms improve after a break (< 30-minutes).

**Step 3: School-specific Activity** (Individualized “Return to Learn” note provided)

- Try 5-10 minutes of “easy” schoolwork at home and increase as able.
- Continue this activity in short bursts (up to 30 minutes) and then work up to longer time periods, as you are able.
- Teachers are to minimize make-up work to essential items only
- 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: Gradual Return to School**

- If able to do 1-2 hours of homework at home for 1-2 days without recurrence/worsening of symptoms, then try returning to school for 1-2 classes or for a couple of hours.
- If symptoms worsen/recur at school, take a break in a quiet, supervised area until symptoms stop. Then try to returning to class. If symptoms worsen/recur, go home, rest and start back at Step 1.
  - Do not plan make-up exams until several days after tolerating full school day.
- Increase time at school by 1-2 classes/day until able to attend a full day.

<b>DO’s and DON’Ts after a Concussion</b>	
<b>DO’s</b>	<b>DON’Ts</b>
Rest: Naps, early bedtimes, sleep in	Stay up late
Stay 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