

RETURN TO PLAY AND EXERCISE



Sports and exercise fuel our bodies and our minds. The key to getting back into the game or the gym is to gradually increase physical activity over time. After a concussion, you should only return to sports practices and regular fitness routines with the approval and under the supervision of your health care provider. Athletes should also work closely with your team's coaches and certified athletic trainer(s). Gradually returning to the game and exercise helps you to manage your symptoms best so you cross the finish line strong.

Strategies



The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has outlined 6 gradual steps that you, along with the guidance of a health care provider, can follow to safely return to play. These steps can be used whether you are an athlete returning to your sport or if you are returning to a regular fitness routine.

It is important to watch for concussion symptoms after each return to play or fitness progression activity. Only move to the next step if you do not have any new symptoms at the current step. If symptoms come back or you experience new symptoms, this is a sign you are pushing too hard. Stop those activities and then contact your health care provider for guidance. In some cases, you may be able to work through one step in a single day, while in other cases it may take several days to work through an individual step. It may take several weeks to months to work through the entire progression.

For Athletes, it is important to progress through each step under the guidance of your coaches and athletic training staff, if available.

- 1** **Back to regular symptom-limited activities**
Gradual return to regular activities (such as school) and you have the green-light from your healthcare provider to begin the return to play or fitness process following several days of relative physical and cognitive rest. This may include light activity (such as short walks) and moderate activity (such as riding a stationary bike) that do not worsen symptoms.
- 2** **Light aerobic activity**
Begin with light aerobic exercise only to increase your heart rate. This means about 5 to 10 minutes on an exercise bike, walking, or light jogging. No weight lifting at this point.
- 3** **Moderate activity**
Continue with activities to increase your heart rate with body or head movement. This includes activities like moderate jogging, brief running, moderate-intensity stationary biking, moderate-intensity weightlifting (less time and/or less weight from their typical routine).
- 4** **Heavy, non-contact activity**
Add heavy non-contact physical activity, such as sprinting/running, high-intensity stationary biking, regular weightlifting routine, non-contact sport-specific drills (in 3 planes of movement).
- 5** **Practice and Full Contact**
Return to practice and full contact (if appropriate for your sport) in controlled practice following medical clearance.
- 6** **Competition and Normal Routines**
Return to competition (if appropriate) or your normal fitness routine

Avoid activities that could put you at risk for another concussion or Second Impact Syndrome (SIS). SIS is a rare event that happens when the brain swells rapidly after a person suffers a second concussion before symptoms of an earlier concussion have subsided. Use common sense and avoid activities that cause your head and body to jolt until you are cleared by your health care provider.

Find different ways to participate. Watch your favorite sporting event if you cannot play or take a short walk with a friend in a park if you aren't able to run.

Athletes should consider seeking out services from a Sports Psychologist if emotional distress is negatively impacting the recovery process. You could learn helpful tools specifically related to mood and adjustment issues following concussion to help your game.

Facilitate communication. It is important that everyone involved in your care is talking. Make sure that coaches and athletic training staff are receiving recommendations from your medical team. Let your medical team be aware of recommendations from your sports team. Sometimes that connection breaks down. Be sure to advocate for yourself by connecting all parties so that you get the best care possible.



Technology

Create a workout plan and track your progress on an app like Jefit

Try a new exercise on a free version of an app like Go that has a variety of levels and workout lengths.

Use a skill on home assistant technology, like My Daybook on Alexa, to take notes on how you are feeling while exercising at home so you can remember later when talking to your medical team.