

After a Mild Head Injury or Concussion Return To Play Guidelines



ILLINOIS EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

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Education for Parents & Caregivers

How soon your child can return to sports and/or rough play depends on how bad the head injury was.

Most head injuries are considered mild or “simple” concussions that recover by themselves over several days. In these cases, it is expected that your child will go quickly through a recommended step wise “Return to Play” plan.

During the first few days of recovery following a mild head injury/concussion, it is important to remind everyone that your child needs both physical and mental rest. Activities that require concentration and attention may make symptoms worse and slow the recovery process. Make sure that your child gets enough sleep at night.

Don't let your child return to sports and/or rough play until your child's doctor says it is safe to do so.

With this step wise plan, your child should continue on to the next level if he/she is **not showing any** after concussion symptoms at that point in time. Each step should take approximately 24 hours (or longer) to move through.

If **any** after concussion symptoms occur, your child should **drop back** to the previous step when he/she wasn't showing any symptoms and try to move through the steps again **after another 24 hours**.

Before returning to play, your child should not only be symptom-free, but also should **not** be taking any medications that may effect or cover up the symptoms of a concussion. If your child suffers repeated concussion without fully recovering from one to the next, he/she can develop life threatening brain swelling (known as Second-Impact Syndrome). **Multiple concussions over time can also cause permanently impaired thought processes and slowed reaction times.**

REMEMBER:
Your child should NOT be having ANY after concussion symptoms before returning to contact sports/rough play.

NOTE: In cases of more serious concussions, the recovery period will be longer and return to play advice will be more based on the specific person. More serious cases should be managed by doctors with a specific knowledge in managing these types of injuries.

Reference: McCrory P, Johnston K, Meeuwisse W, et al. Summary and agreement statement of the 2nd International Conference on Concussion in Sport, Prague 2004. *Clin J Sport Med.* 2005;15:248-55.

This is the recommended step wise recovery plan:

Step #1

No activity, complete rest. Once he/she is not showing any **after concussion symptoms**, then move on to Step #2.

Step #2

Light aerobic exercise such as walking or stationary cycling (NO resistance training). Move on to Step #3.

Step #3

Sport specific exercise (e.g., skating in hockey, running in soccer); slowly add some resistance training during Steps #3 or #4.

Step #4

Non-contact training drills. Move on to Step #5.

Step #5

Full contact training ONLY AFTER MEDICAL CLEARANCE
Move on to Step #6.

Step #6

Back to game play.

AFTER CONCUSSION SYMPTOMS

- Headache
- Feels a “pressure in head”
- Doesn't feel “right”
- Neck pain
- Balance problems / dizziness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Vision problems
- Hears “ringing” in ears
- Feels “dinged” or “dazed”
- Feels slowed down
- Feels like “in a fog”
- Has low energy
- Is moody / cranky / easily upset
- Has trouble concentrating/remembers