

Sample Return to Activity Plan

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. In schools without athletic trainers, the physician must work closely with parents, coaches, and teachers.

We are now recognizing the importance of decreasing the amount of stimuli the brain must process following a concussion. It is essential that an 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 activity such as attending sporting events, dances, and limit time watching TV, playing video games, 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 athlete must have no post-concussion symptoms and be cleared by a physician. Post-concussion symptoms include:

- headache
- fogginess
- difficulty concentrating
- easily confused
- slowed thought processes
- difficulty with memory
- nausea
- lack of energy, tiredness
- dizziness, poor balance, lightheaded
- blurred vision
- sensitive to light and sounds
- poor sleep
- mood changes—irritable, anxious, or tearful

Seven Steps to a Safe Return

- Step 1.** *Complete cognitive rest.* This may include staying home from school or limiting school hours (and studying) for several days. Activities requiring concentration and attention may worsen symptoms and delay recovery.
- Step 2.** *Return to school full-time.*
- Step 3.** *Light exercise.* This step cannot begin until the athlete is cleared by the treating physician for further activity. At this point the athlete may begin walking or riding an exercise bike. No weight-lifting.
- 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.* Must be cleared by your physician before returning to play.

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

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