

After a Concussion:

# RETURN-TO-SPORT STRATEGY



Parachute  
Concussion Series

A concussion is a serious injury, but you can recover fully if your brain is given enough time to rest and recuperate.

Returning to normal activities, including sport participation, is a step-wise process that requires patience, attention, and caution.

In the Return-to-Sport Strategy:

- ▶ Each stage is at least 24 hours.
- ▶ Move on to the next stage when activities are tolerated without new or worsening symptoms.
- ▶ If any symptoms worsen, stop and go back to the previous stage for at least 24 hours.
- ▶ If symptoms return after medical clearance, follow up with a doctor for re-assessment.

## Stage 1: Symptom-limiting activities

After an initial short period of rest of 24 to 48 hours, light cognitive and physical activity can begin, as long as these don't worsen symptoms. You can start with daily activities like moving around the house, simple chores, and gradually introducing school and work activities at home.

## Stage 2: Light aerobic activity

Light exercise such as walking or stationary cycling, for 10 to 15 minutes. The duration and intensity of the aerobic exercise can be gradually increased over time if symptoms don't worsen and no new symptoms appear during the exercise or in the hours that follow. No resistance training or other heavy lifting.

## Stage 3: Individual sport-specific exercise with no contact

Activities such as skating, running, or throwing can begin for 20 to 30 minutes. There should be no body contact or other jarring motions, such as high-speed stops or hitting a ball with a bat. No resistance training.

## Stage 4: Begin training drills with no contact

Add in more challenging drills like passing drills. There should be no impact activities (no checking, no heading the ball, etc.). Start to add in progressive resistance training.

## Stage 5: Full contact practice following clearance by a doctor.

## Stage 6: Return to Sport

Full game play or competition.



### How long does this process take?

Each stage is a minimum of 24 hours, but could take longer, depending on how activities affect the way you feel. Since each concussion is unique, people will progress at different rates. For most people, symptoms improve within 1 to 4 weeks. If you have had a concussion before, you may take longer to heal the next time.

If symptoms are persistent (i.e., last longer than two weeks in adults or longer than four weeks in youth), your doctor should consider referring you to a healthcare professional who is an expert in the management of concussion.

### How do I find the right doctor?

When dealing with concussions, it is important to see a doctor who is knowledgeable in concussion management. This might include your family doctor or a specialist like a sports medicine physician. Your family doctor may be required to submit a referral for you to see a specialist.

Contact the Canadian Academy of Sport and Exercise Medicine (CASEM) to find a sports medicine physician in your area. Visit [www.casem-acmse.org](http://www.casem-acmse.org) for more information. You can also refer your doctor to [parachute.ca/concussion](http://parachute.ca/concussion) for more information.

### What if my symptoms return or get worse during this process?

If symptoms return or get worse, or new symptoms appear, return to the previous stage for at least 24 hours. Continue with activities that you can tolerate.

If symptoms return after medical clearance (Stages 5 and 6) you should be re-assessed by your doctor before resuming activities. Remember, symptoms may return later that day or the next, not necessarily during the activity!

### Never return to sport until cleared by a doctor!

Returning to active play before full recovery from concussion puts you at higher risk of sustaining another concussion, with symptoms that may be more severe and last longer.

### Additional Resources

Available at [parachute.ca/concussion](http://parachute.ca/concussion):

- **Return-to-School Strategy**
- **Canadian Guideline on Concussion in Sport**
- **Concussion: Baseline Testing**