

Concussion

What is a concussion?

A **concussion**—or **mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI)**—happens when a sudden jolt or blow to the head disturbs the way your brain works. This can make you feel confused, disoriented, or dazed. It may also cause you to lose consciousness or to have some memory loss. You don't have to be knocked out to have a concussion.

How long do concussion symptoms last?

It's normal to feel symptoms for several days or weeks. Early on, symptoms may get worse before they improve. While every concussion is different, 80 out of 100 people with sports-related concussions get better within 3 weeks of the injury. Most of the time, symptoms of a concussion go away within a few weeks.

What can I do to speed up recovery?

Be sure to:

- Get plenty of rest.**
 - Limit physical activity to normal daily activities.
 - Avoid exercise, training, and sports.
 - Limit activities such as school, work, and screen time to a level that does not worsen symptoms.
- Get plenty of sleep.** It's common to feel tired and have low energy levels after a concussion. Getting more sleep helps your brain recover. Take short naps during the day if you feel tired. Limit them to less than 1 hour so they don't interfere with night-time sleep, which is the best sleep for your brain.



Signs to watch for in the first few days after concussion

There are a few symptoms that are not normal. If you begin experiencing any of these, you should seek emergency medical care:

- Repeated vomiting
- Worsening, severe headache
- Seizure
- Excessive drowsiness or loss of consciousness
- Confusion or strange behavior
- Slurred speech
- Double vision
- Weakness, numbness, or tingling in arms or legs
- Behavior that is increasingly agitated or combative

- Avoid certain activities. Do not:**
 - Do physical activities that pose a high risk of repeating a head injury.
 - Drive or operate a motorized vehicle until you are cleared by your physician.
 - Exercise, train, and play sports until cleared by your physician, who will complete a return-to-play protocol. **Repeat concussions during the healing period can lead to a long-lasting and more severe brain injury.**

- **Manage symptoms.** Your healthcare provider may have given you a handout with a symptom scale. Try to keep your symptoms in a mild range (0–3 on the 6-point scale). **Patients who are able to do so will typically recover faster.** Also, consider that:
 - As your symptoms improve, you can begin to add short periods (10–15 minutes at a time) of light physical activity as long as your symptoms do not worsen.
 - It’s common to suffer from neck and upper shoulder pain after a concussion. If you have this kind of pain, talk to your healthcare provider about getting physical therapy. You may also try ice therapy for 15–20 minutes, and gentle massage and stretching of your neck and shoulder muscles.
 - It’s common to have mild, long-lasting dizziness after a concussion that should get better over time. If you experience severe dizziness, tell your doctor. There are medical and physical therapy treatments that may quickly help you feel better.

- **Get appropriate nutrition and supplementation.** A well-balanced, healthy diet is helpful during the recovery from a brain injury. Be sure to:
 - Drink plenty of water.
 - Avoid alcohol.
 - Avoid caffeine in the evening as it may affect your sleep.
 - DHA omega-3 supplements, or “fish oils,” may help speed your recovery from a brain injury. Take 1000 mg of DHA twice daily (check the bottle’s label).

- **Take the right medicine.**
 - **You can take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) for your headaches.** Avoid Anti-inflammatory medicines, such as ibuprofen (Advil®), for the first 3 days after your head injury.
 - **Avoid treating every headache with medicine, and try to only treat the more severe headaches.** Often, taking too much medicine for headaches can cause you to have more headaches.
 - **Avoid narcotic pain medicines as these can worsen the effects of a concussion and slow your recovery.**

When can I return to school or work?

Return to school and/or work activities gradually. These activities can often make symptoms worse. Gradually follow these steps and be sure to take several rest breaks throughout the day:

- 1 Increase reading, texting, and screen time 5–15 minutes at a time.**
- 2 Increase time spent doing homework or work activities outside of the work setting.** Use a quiet room, and only work on shorter assignments.
- 3 Return to school / work part-time.** Only attend certain classes, limit the number of tests you take, and do less homework than normal.
- 4 Return to school / work full-time.**

When can I return to play / sports?

You should return to play / sports only after returning to full school or work activities and perhaps clearance from your doctor. Utah law requires that certain athletes have a note from a healthcare provider before returning to play/sport. Follow these steps, taking at least 24 hours before moving on to the next one:

- 1 Perform activities that do not worsen symptoms.**
- 2 Do only light exercise.**
- 3 Begin sport-specific exercises.**
- 4 Perform harder training drills, but avoid contact with other players.**
- 5 Begin full-contact practice.**
- 6 Return to normal game play.**

If symptoms worsen with any step, return to the previous one.

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