



RECOVERING FROM A SPORTS CONCUSSION

What is a concussion?

A concussion is a brain injury. Concussions are caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body. Even a “ding,” “getting your bell rung,” or what seems to be a mild bump or blow to the head can be serious. They can range from mild to severe and can disrupt the way the brain normally works. A concussion can occur with or without loss of consciousness and they affect people differently.

How long will my concussion symptoms last?

Each concussion is different. Some people recover from concussions in several days, many in as little as 3 weeks while for others, symptoms may last for several months. Giving your body the time it needs to heal will benefit you in the long run on and off the playing field.

When can I get back to my regular activities?

Follow your Sports Concussion Clinic provider’s orders. You will be given the California Interscholastic Federation’s Return to Learn and Return to Play protocol. When you are ready, you will progress through the Return to Learn and Return to Play steps. If you experience any symptoms (such as a headache or dizziness), that may be a sign from your body that you are not ready to advance to that next step quite yet. You can try advancing again when your symptoms go down.

Let your body set the pace

Avoid doing too much too soon. It is common to feel anxious to return to your daily activities and the sport you love to play, but rushing through

your recovery can often have the opposite effect you are hoping for. You can delay your recovery by not giving your body enough time to heal. Listen to your body and do not ignore symptoms or “push through the pain.” It can be helpful to think of your recovery as you would training for your sport. As you progress through each step of the Return to Learn and Return to Play protocol, you are getting closer to returning to your sport and activities. Each step you move through is a big accomplishment!

Above all, rest!

After a concussion, your brain needs ample rest to recover. You may feel very fatigued in the first 3-5 days after your concussion as your brain is wanting to recover through rest and sleep. It is important to get plenty of sleep at night and rest quietly during the day during the first week post injury. As you progress through the Return to Learn and Return to Play protocol, you may find you need additional time to do regular tasks. Give yourself breaks and do not push yourself too much when you are doing activities that tax your body or brain, such as reading, homework or attending school.

Step away from the phone

It is hard to avoid electronic screens these days. We use them for education, communicating with friends and entertainment. Unfortunately, the light and stimulation from screens such as smart phones, tablets, televisions and computers can provoke concussion symptoms such as headaches. Limit your screen time as much as possible, especially in the beginning stages of your recovery. As you progress, you can increase your screen time. Although it can be difficult to feel like you are “cut off from the world” by not using your electronic

devices, we know these devices can slow concussion recovery. Some safe activities you can do with electronics include:

- Call friends to talk on the phone.
- Listen to relaxing music.
- Listen to audiobooks or podcasts.
- Listen to guided imagery relaxation - recordings available at kp.org/listen

Nutrition

It is important to maintain (or begin!) a healthy diet as you recover from your concussion. Just as you need fuel to play your sport, your brain needs nutrition to recover from a concussion. What is a healthy diet for athletes?

- Fill up on fruits and vegetables- Fruits and vegetables are high in fiber and rich in antioxidants. Aim for 5-9 servings a day.
- Eat healthy grains. Make half your grains whole grains- Try substituting with brown rice, whole wheat pasta and whole grain bread.
- Protein is an important part of every athlete's diet. Protein helps build and repair muscle. Make healthy choices like grilled chicken, fish, lean beef, eggs, beans, and tofu.
- Choose foods with healthier fats like avocado, nuts and olive oil.
- Cut back on sugary treats and processed foods like pastries, chips and cookies.
- Avoid empty calories from sugary drinks such as sodas, energy drinks and coffee drinks. Even juice is high in sugar. Eat the whole fruit instead!

Stay hydrated!

It is important for all athletes to stay hydrated. We lose fluids and electrolytes through sweat when we exercise. We can replenish these fluids through water. Being dehydrated can lead to impaired performance and slowed recovery. We also know that dehydration can trigger headaches, a common concussion symptom. Remember to drink up! Carry a non-disposable water bottle with you (ex: Hydro Flask) with the goal of drinking the whole bottle. Try adding flavor to your water such as lemon slices,

berries, mint leaves or cucumber. If you drink sports drinks, choose low sugar options like Gatorade G2, Vitamin Water Zero, Propel or Nuun.

Healthy Sleep

Getting a restful night's sleep is an important piece of your concussion recovery. Some people may find that their normal sleep pattern is disrupted by a concussion. Stick to a regular sleep schedule as much as possible and avoid long naps after the beginning stages of your recovery. Other tips that help people sleep well include:

- Avoid caffeine in the evening. This includes coffee, soda and chocolate.
- Ensure your room is at a comfortable temperature for sleep.
- Wear comfortable clothes to sleep in.
- Take a warm bath in the evening.
- Avoid a large meal right before bed.
- Exercise regularly (when you have been cleared to exercise.)
- Relaxing music or "white noise" such as a fan can help people fall asleep.
- Cut back on screen time before bed. If you awake in the night, do not use screens such as your smart phone or TV. The light and mental stimulation from the screens makes it difficult to fall asleep.

Talk to your doctor if you continue to have difficulty falling or staying asleep.

Find enjoyable activities to pass the time

It can be frustrating to have not only your sport taken away from you but also have limitations placed on your daily activities. Remember these restrictions are only temporary. Use this time to enjoy activities that you usually don't have time for. Creative outlets like arts and craft projects can be fun ways to fight boredom. Cooking and baking are also pleasant activities. Listen to your body and pull back if you feel any symptoms. Follow the Return to Learn and Return to Play protocol as a guideline, starting with easier activities.

Keep moving!

After the initial stages of recovery, exercise has been shown to help with concussion recovery. Start slow and listen to your body. Follow the Return to Play activity guidelines. When exercising, avoid bright sunlight and loud noises such as a busy street or a noisy gym. A hat or sun glasses can help to shield bright light. Light physical activity will not only help with your concussion recovery but will also help you maintain some fitness as you gear back up to return to your sport. When given the ok, you can progress to sport specific drills but for now focus on conditioning activities such as walking, jogging, stationary biking and body weight exercises like squats, pushups and planks. Use this opportunity to work on strengthening areas you may have neglected during regular training such as getting a stronger core or improving flexibility. Not sure what you should do? Follow the Return to Play guidelines and talk to your Concussion Clinic provider, coach or athletic trainer.

Return to School

Leaving the controlled environment of your home to go back into a hectic setting like school can cause symptoms to flare up. Your doctor may recommend that you ease back into school, starting at a partial day. Let your body be your guide as you return to classes and school work. If you are experiencing any symptoms such as difficulty concentrating or headaches, you may need to pull back temporarily. You will be given modifications personalized to your specific recovery to help facilitate this return to school. When doing homework, follow your Return to Learn guidelines. Break up your study time into short intervals and allow for plenty of breaks.

Managing stress

Often times athletes turn to their sport to manage stress or let off steam. It is important to find other outlets to manage stress and relax. Take this time to do relaxing activities you may not usually indulge in such as a bubble bath or a pedicure. Top stress management activities include:

- Meditation- download the free app One-Moment Meditation
- Exercise (Remember! Stop if you have any symptoms) – Exercise is meditation in motion. Try walking, biking or swimming

- Yoga- Listen to your body. Start with gentle Restorative Yoga
- Guided Imagery (kp.org/listen)
- Deep breathing exercises
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation- Tense each muscle in your body and slowly release, finger by finger, toe by toe, etc. (visit kp.org/mydoctor for more info)
- Relaxing music
- Positive affirmations - Think of a favorite song lyric, verse, quote or word that brings you strength. Ex- "The body achieves what the mind believes." "This too shall pass." "You shoot me down, but I won't fall. I am titanium (Sia)."
- Aromatherapy- Candles, incense, flowers, essential oils

The mental side of a sports injury

Having a sports injury can be challenging, both physically and mentally. As an athlete, you are trained to work hard towards a goal and a concussion can feel like it is stopping you in your tracks. You may feel many different emotions when recovering from a concussion- anger, frustration, confusion, grieve the loss of playing your sport, or feel left out from team activities. In addition, concussions can trigger feelings of sadness, irritability, anxiousness or nervousness. It is normal



to feel any and all of these feelings. At the same time, stress and negative thinking can slow down recovery from an injury. As difficult as it may be, having a positive attitude can help recovery go more smoothly. Taking these steps can help:

- Build a strong support system.
- Reach out to trusted friends and family members for moral support.
- Speak with your Sports Concussion Clinic team about how you are feeling. We are here to support and encourage you through your recovery process.
- Call Kaiser Permanente Mental Health. Many individuals find it helpful to speak with a counselor to help manage mental wellness during a concussion. Call to schedule an appointment:

Vallejo Mental Health: (707) 645-2700
Vacaville Mental Health: (707) 624-2830

- Maintain a positive attitude. Positive self-talk can help with recovery. Tell yourself "I can do this." "I am stronger than my injury." Shift your focus to healing and recovery rather than thinking of what you are missing out on.
- Use your mind to heal your body. You may have done visualizations preparing for your game or race. In the same way, you can visualize your recovery. Imagine your body going through the steps of healing, up to playing in your sport again. The mind body connection can be very powerful.
- Set realistic goals. Many athletes are goal oriented people on and off the playing field. Goals help keep us motivated. Your goals should be focused on recovery rather than performance right now. Listen to your Sports Concussion Clinic provider and use the Return to Learn and Return to Play steps as your guide. Be flexible with your goal timeline. Remember, we cannot rush the brain to heal.
- "This too shall pass." While for some it may

feel that recovery is dragging on, remember this is only temporary. Be patient with your body. "It's not about the setback. It's about the comeback."

- Find the good- A healthy practice for positive thinking is thinking of people, places and things we are thankful for. Many like to write these good things down in a Gratitude Journal. Challenge yourself to find (at least) one good thing each day!
- Think like a champion. When things get tough in competition, you don't give up. In the same way, you can come out of recovery as a stronger athlete. This is called resilience. Listen to athlete Janine Shepherd recounting her inspiring recovery from injury for inspiration (www.ted.com/speakers/janine_shepherd)

Return to Sport

Return to competition only when you are 100% healthy. Remember, it is better to sit out a few games than miss an entire season or worse, have a career ending injury. By following the Return to Learn and Return to Play protocol correctly, most athletes return to sport successfully.

Resources

Concussion Recovery

- Kp.org/vacaville/sportsconcussion
 - kp.org/mydoctor (Search: concussion)
 - cifstate.org/sports-medicine/concussions
- cdc.gov/headsup

General Health

- Kp.org/youngadulthealth
- choosemyplate.gov
- letsmove.gov
- girlshealth.gov