

# Could a concussion be doing your head in?

## We can help!

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*Last month we looked at the factors involved in diagnosing a concussion after an injury. This month we will take a look at the steps needed to safely return from a concussion.*

Typically it takes around 7-10 days to return from a concussion, but there are six important steps to follow along your way.

The first step after a concussion is complete rest and recovery. Rest includes physical rest, no exercise or sporting activities, and cognitive rest which includes no watching television, texting, video game, reading or any activities that irritate the concussive symptoms



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(headaches, dizziness, etc... ). Once the individual can go 24 hours with no symptoms, they move on to the next stage.

We then begin to introduce light exercise: this includes walking, swimming, or cycling with a goal to lightly increase the heart rate. Again, after 24 symptom-free hours, progress to sport specific exercises, no specific drills but getting back to sport activities (eg. skating).

Next step is to return to a non-contact sport specific drill, with 24 hours free of symptoms, you may then progress to full practice with contact if it's required for the sport.

The next step is full return to participation. The key to remember with this rehabilitation protocol is a required 24 hours without

symptoms before progressing to the next step. Also, if at any point during the rehabilitation the individual has any symptoms, they then return to step one of complete physical and cognitive rest and begin the process all over again. Again, for most, this process will take 7-10 days but there are a few who continue on with longer lasting symptoms despite constant rest; this is called **post-concussion syndrome**. However, a recent study from the *Clinical Journal of Sport Medicine* found that aerobic exercise helped decrease these symptoms. They took a group comprised of both athletes and non-athletes with persistent concussion symptoms and did a graded exercise test until either

exhaustion or the first sign of symptoms. Then followed aerobic exercises (walking or cycling) 5-6 days per week for the same duration as the exercise test at an intensity of **80% of maximum heart rate** (220-age). At the end of the study, 10 of the 12 subjects were symptom-free. This shows that a properly designed exercise program can help those with persistent concussion symptoms return to both sporting and everyday activities.

A physiotherapist is a qualified health care professional who can help you manage your post-concussive symptoms and successfully guide you through your rehabilitation to return to your regular activities.



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