WHAT YOUR BRAIN NEEDS

What is a Concussion?

A concussion is a type of brain injury caused by a blow, 'jolt' or bump to the head. Symptoms may vary from one individual to the next both in type and severity. The good news, is that with proper management, concussion symptoms typically resolve completely within a few weeks.

Concussion Symptoms

- **Physical Symptoms:** headache, dizziness, nausea, light/sound sensitivity
- **Cognitive Symptoms:** difficulty with attention, concentration, memory
- **Behavioural/Emotional:** irritability, anxiety, depression, impulsiveness
- **Sleep Disturbance:** difficulty falling asleep, sleeping more than usual, fatigue, drowsiness

"Concussion is a traumatic brain injury induced by biomechanical forces, which may be caused either by a direct blow to the head, face, neck or elsewhere on the body with an impulsive force transmitted to the head (1)"

Rest in the early phase of the injury, especially in the first 24-48 hours, plays a crucial role in recovery. New evidence suggests however that getting physically active early (after an initial 1-2 days of rest) may facilitate a quicker recovery (2). Early exercise in this case may be as easy as a daily walk and as a rule, should NOT further aggravate symptoms. Speak with your Physician before returning to sport or any activity that poses a risk of head contact.

Concussions may also require a level of cognitive rest in the early stages. Tasks requiring attention, concentration and visual effort require considerable energy (work) to accomplish. However, after the initial 24-48 hour rest period, individuals should gradually resume regular daily activities at a level which does not significantly exacerbate symptoms. Some individuals may benefit from certain work or school accommodations for a time until symptoms improve (such as reduced classes/workload, frequent break allowances, access to quiet work spaces, etc.) Our health professionals can guide you through this process.

Current recommendations suggest eliminating or moderating the following after experiencing a concussion (first 24-48 hours):

- **Television**
- **Video Games**
- **Texting**
- **Reading**
- **Computer-work**

The goal is to limit visual-cognitive activity to a level that is tolerable and does not worsen or result in the re-emergence of the concussion symptoms. As symptoms improve, try adding in short (15-min) intervals of these activities and increase duration as tolerated.

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Prescriptions for extreme rest, often called "black box therapy" are often unjustified following concussion (3). Engaging in activities that do not further aggravate symptoms is encouraged. Speak with your Health Professional about what is safe.

What Activities are Safe?

In general, activities that do not require significant visual demand are often tolerated reasonably well after concussion. It is important to keep yourself engaged in some level of activity. Consider trying:

- **Podcasts**
- **Audio books**
- **Listening to music**
- **Listening to a radio or TV program**
- **Going for a walk**
- **Gentle household chores (eg. folding laundry)**

Return to School/Work:

A few days of absence may be required from work or school during the early phase of recovery. In general, return to school or the workplace is highly individual and is often more successful when there is room for temporary modifications such as reduced duration, workload, or alternate task options (to limit computer work, reading, etc.). Ask your Healthcare Provider what is best for your case.

Sleep and Concussion

It is not usually necessary to have someone wake you up in the night after experiencing a concussion. Get a good night's sleep and rest when you need in those first 24-48 hours.

After the initial rest phase, it is important to maintain a healthy sleep routine. Try to eliminate napping altogether or keep naps short (no greater than 30 minutes) and early in the day (before 3pm). It is more important to get a good night's rest in the evening. Maintain a consistent bedtime, and build in time to "wind down" before bed.

GET THE HELP YOU NEED

When should I seek further treatment?

Concussions, like any other physical injury, should be properly managed and rehabilitated - especially when symptoms persist beyond the first few days. Consider seeking help from our Rehabilitation Professionals trained in Concussion Management under the following circumstances:

- Symptoms persist despite early rest
- Presence of ongoing neck pain or stiffness
- Ongoing symptoms of dizziness or visual complaints (eye pain, blurry vision)
- Difficulty returning to school or work
- Continued cognitive, sleep difficulties, or emotional changes.

References

(1) McCrory P. et al. Consensus statement on concussion in sport - the 5th international conference on concussion in sport held in Berlin, October 2016. Br J Sports Med 2017; 0:1-10.

(2) Grool AM. et al. Association between early participation in physical activity following acute concussion and persistent postconcussive symptoms in children and adolescents. JAMA. 2016;316(23):2504-2514.

(3) Wells EM et al. Challenges in determining the role of rest and exercise in the management of mild traumatic brain injury. Journal of Child Neurology. 2016; 31(1): 86-92.

RECOVERY TIMEFRAMES

Most concussions resolve within a short time-frame but some may persist up to a month or longer . A small percentage of individuals may go on to experience "Persistent Post-Concussion Symptoms" - a term used to describe the persistence of concussion-related symptoms beyond the expected recovery time-frame.

It is normal to feel frustrated, sad or angry during your recovery because you cannot return to sports, work or academic activities right away.

In Partnership with shiftCM concussion management