

# Caring for your child with a concussion

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## Your child has a concussion

- A concussion is a type of brain injury that changes the way your child's brain normally works.
- Your child's brain needs some time to heal.
- Symptoms of concussion usually go away within 10 to 14 days, but may take longer.
- Your child may need to limit activities while they are recovering from a concussion.
- Exercise and activities that involve a lot of concentration (such as reading, studying, working on the computer or playing video games) may cause concussion symptoms to reappear or get worse.

## Signs and symptoms of concussion

Category	Examples
Thinking and remembering	Difficulty thinking clearly, feeling slowed down, difficulty concentrating, difficulty remembering new information
Physical	Headache, nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light or noise, feeling tired, having no energy, dizziness, poor balance or coordination, problems with vision
Emotions and moods	Irritability, sadness, more emotional, nervousness or anxiety
Sleep	Sleeping more than usual, sleeping less than usual, trouble falling asleep, waking often

## Helping your child recover

These pictures show an overview of recovery. This is only a general guide, as each child's recovery will be different.



### At first, your child needs a lot of rest and little activity

- Your child needs a good night's sleep and naps or rest breaks during the day when they feel tired or have concussion symptoms.
- Your child should avoid activities that require energy or effort. Exertion can make their symptoms come back or get worse.
- Avoid or limit screen time (such as TV, tablet, texting or video games). Begin with 5 to 10 minutes at a time. Gradually increase screen time as your child's symptoms allow.

#### **Important!**

Each child recovers differently.

**It is important to be aware of your child's symptoms.**

Do not ignore symptoms or encourage your child to 'push through' their symptoms. This will make their recovery take longer.

## Your child may need to gradually return to school, activity and work

- Your child can begin the process of returning to these activities when they have no symptoms. Any time their symptoms return, they must stop and allow their brain to rest.
- Being away from friends and activities they enjoy may make your child feel sad, angry and frustrated. Talk about this with your child often, and offer support and encouragement.
- Some children have 'persistent symptoms', which last for more than 30 days. If this happens, your child may need support from psychological and/or concussion experts.

## Managing headaches

- It is safe to give your child ibuprofen (Advil®) or acetaminophen (Tylenol®) for headaches. Ask your child to tell you when they get a headache.
- It is best to give pain medication as soon as the headache starts, rather than waiting for the pain to get bad.
- It may be helpful to keep track of your child's headaches and activities related to them.

## When to get medical help



### Red flag symptoms

If you notice any of the following symptoms, take your child to a hospital Emergency Department right away, or CALL 911:

- increased drowsiness
- worsening headache or neck pain
- repeated vomiting
- seizures
- blurred or double vision (or worsening vision problems)
- slurred speech
- loss of movement
- changes in behaviour (irritability, agitation or aggression)

## Returning to school

**If your child does not have concussion symptoms**, they can return to school half days.

- If symptoms do not return, your child can gradually spend more time at school until they are back to full days.
- If symptoms return, your child should not go to school and rest for a few days. When symptoms go away, your child can start again with half days at school.

**If your child has concussion symptoms**, they should not return to school and rest for a few days. Then, they can begin to practice reading, writing and thinking activities for 5 to 15 minutes at a time. If symptoms do not return, your child can gradually increase this practice time to prepare for school.

### **When returning to school after a concussion your child may need to:**

- take rest breaks
- spend fewer hours at school
- spend less time reading, writing or working on the computer
- be given more time to take tests or complete assignments
- get help with their homework and missed school work

### **What to watch for when your child returns to school:**

- increased problems paying attention or concentrating
- increased problems learning new things and remembering
- longer time to complete tasks or assignments
- difficulty organizing tasks
- greater irritability
- less able to cope with stress or more emotional

Schools may be aware of your child's needs when returning after a concussion. It is important to discuss any specific concerns you have about your child with their teacher and/or principal.

**If your child's symptoms last more than 2 weeks and/or they are unable to return to school, see your family doctor for further assessment and advice.**

## Returning to activity

When your child has no symptoms and 1 to 2 days of rest, they can gradually return to sports and recreational activities. Your child may have some difficulty at first with attention, processing speed and reaction time, so a slow return to activity is necessary to prevent injury.

### Follow these steps when your child has no concussion symptoms and has had 1 to 2 days of rest:

Step	Activity
<b>1</b>	Light aerobic activity. 5 to 10 minutes of walking, light jog or exercise bike. No weight lifting, jumping or hard run.
<b>2</b>	Moderate activity. Moderate jogging, brief running, moderate intensity on bike, or light weight training.
<b>3</b>	Close to typical routine, but non-contact.
<b>4</b>	Practice and full contact.
<b>5</b>	Competitive and team play.

This process varies for each child.

Depending on your child's symptoms, it can take several days or months to work through these steps.

### If your child gets symptoms of concussion at any step:



Your child should stop the activity for 24 hours. Symptoms are a sign that your child's brain is not ready for that amount of effort.

If there are no symptoms after 24 hours, your child can start again, at the previous step.

**If your child's symptoms last more than 2 weeks and/or they are unable to return to activity, see your family doctor for further assessment and advice.**

## Returning to work

- When your child has returned to activity without return of concussion symptoms, they may consider returning to work.
- Return to work will depend on the nature of their job. If their job requires a lot of physical and mental effort, there is greater risk of injury. Some changes or restrictions to their work may be needed.
- Involve your family doctor in the decisions about your child's return to work. Visit your family doctor if your child's symptoms reoccur or they have difficulty resuming their work activities.

## For more information about concussion

### Hamilton Helmet Initiative

[www.mcmasterchildrenshospital.ca/body.cfm?id=402](http://www.mcmasterchildrenshospital.ca/body.cfm?id=402)



### Brain Smart Hamilton

[www.mcmasterchildrenshospital.ca/body.cfm?id=439](http://www.mcmasterchildrenshospital.ca/body.cfm?id=439)



### Parachute: Concussion Ed

A free mobile app for youth, parents and educators. Available in English and French. Download at the Apple App Store or Google Play.



### Ontario Ministry of Education

[www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/healthyschools/concussion.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/healthyschools/concussion.html)

### CanChild

<https://www.canchild.ca/>

### Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation

<http://onf.org/documents/guidelines-for-concussion-mtbi-persistent-symptoms-second-edition>

### Acute Concussion Evaluation (ACE) tool © Gioia & Collins, 2006 v2

<https://www.cdc.gov/headsup/pdfs/providers/ace-a.pdf>

### Ontario Brain Institute

<http://braininstitute.ca/>

# Deciding if your child can return to school after a concussion

