

Example advice leaflet for patients returning to sport after a head injury: a return to play protocol.

Adapted from McCrory et al (2005)⁴⁹


The majority of sport-related injuries will be simple concussions that will recover spontaneously over several days. In these situations, it is expected that an athlete will proceed rapidly through the step-wise return to play protocol.

In the first few days following an injury, it is important to emphasise to the athlete that physical and cognitive rest is required. Activities that require concentration and attention may exacerbate the symptoms and as a result delay recovery. The return to play following a concussion follows a step-wise process.

ADVICE FOR GRADUAL RETURN TO SPORT AFTER A HEAD INJURY

- You have sustained a concussion or minor head injury.
- Before you return to sport full time it is important that you follow a step-wise return to play protocol to allow you to return safely.
- It is likely that you may experience a number of symptoms as a result of your head injury, such as: mild headache, dizziness, memory problems, poor concentration, irritability, tiredness, sleep disruption.
- You must be sure that your symptoms have completely cleared at each exercise level for at least 24 hours before you progress to the next level.
- If symptoms develop at any exercise level then you should return to level one and have 24 hours rest.
- Contact your GP if your symptoms are not improving.
- You should not return to any full sporting activity in less than one week.
- If you were unconscious or had a significant memory loss after your head injury you should have no full contact activity (level 5) within three weeks. Ask your doctor for advice before going back to full contact activity.

RETURN TO PLAY PROTOCOL



LEVEL 1	No physical activity /complete rest
LEVEL 2	Low levels of physical activity ie symptoms do not come back during or after the activity. eg walking, light jogging, light stationary biking, light weightlifting (lower weight, higher reps, no bench, no squat).
LEVEL 3	Sport specific training or moderate levels of physical activity with body/head movement eg running in football, moderate jogging, brief running, moderate-intensity stationary biking, moderate-intensity weightlifting (reduced time and/or reduced weight from your typical routine).
LEVEL 4	Heavy non-contact physical activity / training drills eg sprinting/running, high-intensity stationary biking, regular weightlifting, routine non-contact sport-specific drills.
LEVEL 5	Full contact in controlled training/practice.
LEVEL 6	Full contact in games/ Return to competition.