

After a concussion:

# RETURN-TO-SPORT STRATEGY



Parachute  
Concussion Series

Returning to activities, including sport participation, after a concussion is a step-wise process.

## In the Return-to-Sport Strategy:

- Each step is at least 24 hours.
- It is common and OK for a person's symptoms to worsen mildly and briefly\* with activity as they move through the return-to-sport steps. But, if their symptoms worsen more than this, they should stop the activity and try again the next day at the same step.
- If symptoms return after medical clearance, follow up with a doctor for re-assessment.

**\*Symptom worsening should not last more than one hour.**

## Step 1: Activities of daily living and relative rest (first 24 to 48 hours)

For the first 24 to 48 hours after the injury, start with daily activities such as moving around the home, preparing meals, light walking and social interactions (e.g., talking with friends or family). Minimize screen time.

## Step 2: Light to moderate effort aerobic exercise

**2A:** Start with light aerobic exercise such as walking or stationary cycling at a slow to medium pace. May begin light resistance training that does not result in more than mild and brief worsening of symptoms.

**2B:** Gradually increase the intensity of aerobic exercise to moderate effort, such as stationary cycling or walking at a brisk pace. Moderate effort means the activity may cause faster breathing and heart rate, but not enough to prevent you from being able to talk comfortably.

## Step 3: Individual sport-specific activities, without risk of inadvertent head impact

Add sport-specific activities, such as running, skating or throwing drills, that can be done individually (away from other participants) in a low-risk environment. Activities should be supervised by a coach, trainer, teacher or parent/caregiver. Continue progressing at this step until symptom-free, even when exercising.

**Medical clearance is required before step 4.**



## Step 4: Training drills and activities with no contact

Progress to usual intensity exercise and add in more challenging drills such as passing drills. Participate in multi-athlete training (if applicable) and non-contact practices. There should be no impact activities (e.g., no checking, no heading the ball).

## Step 5: Return to non-competitive activities, full-contact practice and physical education activities

Progress to typical physical activities, except for competitive gameplay. Restore confidence and skills.

## Step 6: Return to sport and physical activity without restriction.

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### How long does this process take?

Each stage is a minimum of 24 hours but could take longer. Since each concussion is unique, people will progress at different rates. For most people, symptoms improve within four weeks. If you have had a concussion before, you may take longer to heal the next time.

If symptoms last longer than four weeks, your doctor should consider referring you to a licensed healthcare professional who is an expert in the management of concussion.

### What if my symptoms return or get worse during this process?

It is common for symptoms to worsen mildly and briefly as you return to activities. If your symptoms

feel a little worse for up to one hour, this is OK. But if they feel worse for longer than that, or if they feel much worse, take a break from activity and try again at the same step the next day.

Symptoms should not return after medical clearance (i.e., during step 4, 5 or 6). If symptoms come back, return to step 3 for symptoms to resolve. You will need to be re-assessed for medical clearance again before moving to step 4.

**Never return to activities with risk of contact until cleared by a doctor!**

### Additional resources

Scan the QR code or visit [parachute.ca/concussion](https://parachute.ca/concussion)

