



# RECOVERING FROM CONCUSSION

## What is a Concussion?

A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury (TBI). It is caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head or body that causes the head and brain to move quickly back and forth. Some of the ways you can get a concussion are when you hit your head during a fall, car crash, sports injury. It can occur with or without loss of consciousness.

It usually takes a little while for the brain to recover from a concussion but in most cases there are no lasting symptoms or ill effects. With a concussion the most rapid recovery occurs in the first few weeks although some take longer to recover.

The symptoms of concussion can be very debilitating, and make work, study, and daily tasks very difficult. It is crucial that everyone with a potential head injury have prompt medical assessment, and follow a care plan for complete recovery. Return to contact sport before a concussion is completely healed is dangerous, with the risk of further more serious head and other injuries significantly increased.

The New Zealand Ice Hockey Federation considers player safety as its core priority. In conjunction with other New Zealand sporting organisations, and in agreement with IIHF policy and the 2017 International Consensus Statement on Concussion in Sport, it has developed clear policy regarding the management of concussion in our sport. Please see the NZIHF website for further information.

## What do I need to know?

This form is designed to provide basic information regarding concussion. For anyone without medical training, the IIHF-endorsed **Concussion Recognition Tool 5** is a very useful single page information sheet to if there is a player you are concerned about. No one expects you to make the medical diagnosis of concussion, and is available on the NZIHF website. We recommend it be easily available wherever ice hockey is played. ACC SportSmart also provides excellent information at:

<https://accsportsmart.co.nz/concussion/>

Player safety demands that if there is any concern for concussion, that the player be managed appropriately. For this it is helpful to remember 3 R's for concussion:

**Recognise** the Signs and Symptoms

**Remove** the Player from Play

**Refer** them to a doctor for assessment

## Symptoms of Concussion:

Symptoms can be varied, and may include; headache, confusion, difficulty concentrating or remembering, balance difficulties, nausea, dizziness, ringing in the ears, becoming light sensitive, sleepiness and excessive fatigue, irritability and mild mood lability. These symptoms may not occur immediately, but set in over several minutes to possibly a few days later.

If you are concerned you or someone you know might have a concussion, the first step is to remove yourself (or them) from play, and to get a medical assessment by a doctor promptly. In most cases this should be done within 24 hours, but may need to be done sooner if concerning symptoms are present, as noted below.

## When to see a doctor immediately:

If the player has symptoms such as:

- loss of consciousness, however brief
- vomiting
- slurred speech
- vision changes
- confusion or disorientation
- convulsions or seizures
- memory loss, e.g. being unable to remember what happened before or after the concussion
- drowsiness or difficulty staying awake
- changes in mood or behaviour, eg unusual irritability
- a headache that gets worse and does not go away.
- weakness, numbness, or lack of physical co-ordination.

***Symptoms of a concussion may be delayed and not appear until days after the injury. You can call Healthline 0800 611 116 if you are unsure what you should do. Healthline is a free service that connects you with a registered nurse 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.***

## Treatment

There's no specific medication or treatment that functions as an easy cure for concussion. Rest and pulling back on activities help the brain to recover, but you a gradual return to all activities can start early in your recovery. Do not try too much too fast. You should work out a recovery plan with your doctor. Other helpful advice includes:

- Getting plenty of rest and sleep helps the brain to heal.
- Have a graduated return to activity/academic work, and progress as discussed with your doctor.
- Recognise that you may need to activities that require a lot of thinking or concentration, eg working on the computer, playing video games, phone use, tv. Don't do these activities to the point of getting symptoms – know your limits and respect them.
- Do not drink any alcohol until you are fully recovered. Your brain needs all its energy to heal.
- Limit exposure to bright lights and loud sounds.

- Stay hydrated.
- Your doctor can prescribe medication that can help some of your symptoms, such as nausea and headaches.
- You might need time off work and University work. Talk to your doctor.

## Return to sport and other physical activity

You should develop a plan with your doctor to gradually progress back to participation in sport. All sporting organisations in New Zealand are signatories to the 2017 *Consensus Statement on Concussion in Sport*, and require you to go through a graduated return to play program before return to full participation in sport. ***The NZIHF requires you to have written medical clearance to return to contact training and play. Any contact play without this written clearance is prohibited.***

Even if you are not going to be involved in contact play after your injury, this gradual return approach is essential to your successful return to your pre-injury state of health.

## Return to Learn/School, and Work

Concussion involves many symptoms that may make doing your academics and work difficult. Much like the approach to return to sport, a graduated, progressive plan for return to academic work is beneficial. Your doctor can guide you in this, and help you by writing medical certificates or other documentation as needed to allow you to recover successfully.

## What to Do if Someone You Know Has a Head Injury

It is very important to carefully monitor a person who has had a head injury, as symptoms may develop later. It is very important that anyone who suffers a head injury be watched over the next 24 hours in case they do worsen. If the person is unconscious or is unable to move all or some of their limbs, or is complaining of neck pain at the time of the accident: ***Call 111 immediately.*** Do not move the person (unless it is dangerous to leave them where they are).

## Self-Care

If you or someone you know has a minor head injury with no immediately worrying symptoms, try these ideas. If you have any concerns at all, see your doctor.

- Apply ice or a cool pack for 10 to 20 minutes, every two to four hours, for the next day or two. (Wrapped ice or a pack of frozen vegetables will work well.) This will reduce swelling of the scalp and help with the pain.
- Drink only clear fluids for the first 2 hours, to decrease the likelihood of vomiting.
- Take nothing stronger than paracetamol for pain.
- Rest – someone must stay with the injured person if they sleep.

- Check every 2 hours to see if the person wakes easily (if asleep) and responds normally; that their behaviour and movements are normal; and that they know who they are and where they are.
- A responsible person should stay with the person for 24 hours after the injury.
- The injured person shouldn't drink any alcohol for 24 hours, and then only if symptom-free.
- See a doctor within if there symptoms or concern for concussion

The NZIHF has concise information regarding how to manage a concussion. Please see the NZIHF website for further information. ACC Sport Smart also provides information on concussion online:

<https://accsportsmart.co.nz/concussion/>.

References [www.health.govt.nz](http://www.health.govt.nz), [www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org), [www.cdhb.health.nz](http://www.cdhb.health.nz) <https://accsportsmart.co.nz/concussion/>

Form developed by N. Taylor and B. Dougherty for the University of Otago Student Health Services, adapted for NZIHF use by permission.