

# What You Need to Know About Concussion

This information sheet provides a brief overview on the appropriate care for an individual with a concussion. It outlines the three key steps in dealing with concussion (i.e. recognize, respond and manage) in order to assist your players/athletes in their recovery from this injury. The information included here is meant to supplement what is included in the CATT online courses. Visit [cattonline.com](http://cattonline.com) to take a knowledge course.

## Recognize

A concussion occurs when there is a significant impact to the head or body that causes the brain to move inside the skull. Common causes of concussion include **falls, motor vehicle crashes, and sport and recreational-related activities.**

There is no way to know for certain whether a particular event will lead to a concussion—a relatively minor impact may result in a concussion while a higher-magnitude hit may not. It is important to note that if there is a history of concussion, even a minor hit can trigger symptoms. Signs can be observed while symptoms are experienced by the individual.

The signs and symptoms of concussion in **individuals** include, but are not limited to:

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Blurred vision
- Light/sound sensitivity
- Imbalance
- Ringing in the ears
- Seeing “stars”
- Irritability
- Fogginess
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating
- Poor memory
- Neck pain
- Sadness
- Confusion

Concussion signs to watch for in an **infant or toddler** may include:

- Crankiness and irritability (beyond their usual)
- Any sudden changes in sleeping pattern, eating or playing pattern
- Not interested in their favourite toys or activities
- Forgets a new skill (e.g., toilet training)
- Listless
- Loss of balance, unsteady walking
- Not eating or nursing
- Cannot be comforted

## Respond

Following a potential concussion-causing event, the individual should be removed from activity immediately and assessed for **Red Flags**.

If any of the **Red Flags** are present, call an ambulance or seek immediate medical care.

If no **Red Flags** are present:

- Do not leave the individual alone
- Notify an emergency contact person, parent or caregiver
- Continue to monitor for Red Flags and signs and symptoms of concussion
- Do not let the individual return to their activity
- Do not give the individual any immediate medication
- Do not let the individual leave by themselves
- Do not let the individual drive or ride a bike

### RED FLAGS

-  Neck pain or tenderness
-  Double vision
-  Weakness or tingling/burning in arms or legs
-  Severe or increasing headache
-  Seizure or convulsion
-  Loss of consciousness
-  Deteriorating conscious state
-  Vomiting
-  Increasingly restless, agitated, or combative

The individual should be monitored for up to 48 hours before assuming that a concussion has not occurred, including monitoring throughout the night following the initial injury. Only wake the individual if you have concerns about their breathing, changes in skin colour, or how they are sleeping. Call an ambulance or seek immediate medical care if the individual is slow to wake or shows any of the **Red Flags**. Within 48 hours:

- If any signs are detected or symptoms are experienced, seek medical attention from a licensed medical professional such as a physician or nurse practitioner (if applicable in your area).
- If no signs or symptoms appear, the individual can return to normal activity but should be monitored for several days. If no signs or symptoms appear, chances are that a concussion was not sustained. If unsure, see a medical professional for guidance.

## Manage

A concussion can have a significant impact on physical, cognitive, and emotional functioning. The recovery process involves balancing activities such that they do not trigger or worsen symptoms—the key is finding the “sweet spot.”

The recovery process is best done in collaboration with key individuals, such as medical professionals, family members, friends, employers, teachers and school staff, and coaches.

**The first and most important step in recovery from a concussion is to rest for a maximum of 2 days.** The individual will need both physical and cognitive rest in order to allow the brain to heal.

- Physical rest includes participation in activities that do not result in an increased heart rate or breaking a sweat. Restrict: exercise, sports, running, biking, rough play, etc.
- Cognitive activity should be limited, minimizing activities that require concentration and learning. Restrict: reading, electronics (computers, smartphones, video games, TV), work/schoolwork, playing musical instruments, listening to loud music, etc.

### REMEMBER:

**Recovery is a fluctuating process. The individual can be doing well one day but not the next.**

Once symptoms start to improve, or after a maximum of 2 days of rest, the individual should begin a step-wise process to return to regular activity, including school, work, sports, etc.

Symptoms should decrease over the course of time. If you are worried that the individual is not improving, follow-up with a licensed medical professional, such as a physician or nurse practitioner (if applicable in your area).

**On average, an adult takes 7 to 10 days to recover from concussion, while children and youth typically take 2 to 4 weeks.** While most concussions resolve within 3 months, persistent symptoms have the potential to cause long-term difficulties. Individuals dealing with symptoms lasting longer than 2 weeks in adults and longer than 4 weeks in children and youth may require additional medical assessment and multidisciplinary management.

### REMEMBER:

**CATT resources to support the recovery process include:**

- **Return to Activity**
- **Return to School**
- **Return to Sport**

The recovery period may be influenced by:

- Prior concussions
- History of headaches or migraines
- Learning disabilities
- Mental health issues
- ADHD
- Use of drugs or alcohol
- Returning to activities too soon
- Lack of family or social supports

Proper management of a concussion can reduce the risk of complications. It is important that the individual has successfully returned to school or work before fully returning to sport and physical recreation activities. Returning to activity too early may result in more severe symptoms and potentially long-term problems.