



COACHING YOUR ATHLETES BACK TO SPORTS AFTER A CONCUSSION



WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a brain injury that occurs when a person is in motion and abruptly comes to a stop due to an external force (such as a collision with another athlete or falling and hitting the ground). The force of that event causes the brain to move rapidly within the skull. This movement produces microscopic damage to millions of nerve cells in the brain.

When a concussion occurs, the brain does not have enough energy to simultaneously heal those damaged nerve cells AND perform all of the normal tasks it would do throughout a day. By not adhering to a proper concussion recovery plan, it takes even longer for the brain to recover. This can prolong concussion symptoms and the length of time your athlete is sidelined from their sport.



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SPORTS CONCUSSION MYTHS + FACTS

MYTH: Your athlete has to be knocked unconscious to have a concussion

TRUTH: Loss of consciousness only happens in 10% of all concussions

MYTH: Your athlete has to hit their head (on the ground) to sustain a concussion

TRUTH: Any force to the body that produces a sudden stop of movement can result in a concussion

MYTH: If your athlete no longer has concussion symptoms they are healed and can return to full play

TRUTH: The brain takes a minimum of 22-30 days to heal regardless if symptoms are present. An athlete must be able to pass a successful return to play program.

MYTH: If your athlete does not have symptoms right after a potential concussive force, they do not have a concussion

TRUTH: It can take 48-72 hours for concussion symptoms to develop. Athletes should be observed for 24 hours to ensure their safety

MYTH: Your athlete does not have a concussion if their imaging from the hospital was normal

TRUTH: Damage from a concussion happens at a microscopic level that is not visible on current imaging practices



WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU SUSPECT AN ATHLETE GOT A CONCUSSION?

- Immediately remove your athlete from play/practice
- If an athletic trainer is available, have the athlete screened
- If a trainer is not available, check your athlete for the following types of symptoms
 - Memory of the event, where they are, score of game, etc.
 - Impaired balance or coordination
 - Complaints of dizziness, head pain, or nausea
 - Nausea or vomiting
- Do not allow the athlete to return to play/practice that day until they are evaluated by a medical professional
- If the athlete demonstrates any of these symptoms, consider it a medical emergency:
 - Numbness, tingling or weakness in arms/legs
 - Slurred speech
 - Unequal pupils
 - Repeated nausea/vomiting or worsening of head pain
 - Any loss of consciousness
 - Seizure activity



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HELPING YOUR ATHLETE RECOVER: THE FIRST 48 HOURS

You should not allow your athlete to attend practice or games during the first 2-3 days after a concussion. During this initial period of healing, your athlete needs as much physical and cognitive (brain) rest as possible.

During the first few days following a concussion, the brain is still experiencing a crash in energy levels. Symptoms of the injury continue to evolve and change during this time period. The athlete should be resting at home and not attending school or doing homework. Time on screens (i.e.: televisions, cell phones, tablets) should be limited. Listening to quiet music may be tolerated fine. The athlete should be encouraged to rest and sleep as needed.

It is important as a coach to set a positive environment for your athletes to discuss concussions and recovery. Many youth athletes do not report their symptoms because they do not want to let their coach or team down. Playing through a concussion increases the risk of a second concussion. That could result in Second Impact Syndrome and have potentially fatal consequences.

Concussions are an injury that will occur during sports – just like sprains, dislocations, cuts, and breaks. We just have to treat them appropriately like we would any other injury!



HELPING YOUR ATHLETE RECOVER: RETURN TO PLAY

Your athlete can return to the team as tolerated after the initial resting period. However, they can not immediately return to full practice or competition. Remember that it takes 22-30 days for their brain to heal, so we need to give them time to recover while still being able to interact with their team. Following a return-to-play program is an essential part of your athlete's recovery. There must be a minimum of 24 hours of no significant symptom increase between each stage of the Return to Play program. It is ideal if your athlete can work with a concussion specialist to help guide this process. Also make sure your athlete has medical clearance to participate in their sport.

STAGE 1: Light aerobic exercise (up to 30 minutes of walking, stationary bicycle riding)

STAGE 2: Heavier Exercise (light weight training, jogging)

STAGE 3: Full weight training, sprints, non-contact drills (Do not begin until athlete is also tolerating a full day of school without accommodations for their injury)

STAGE 4: Full practice with contact

STAGE 5: Competition



FINAL THOUGHTS ON HELPING YOUR ATHLETES RECOVER FROM CONCUSSION:

Whether you are coaching within a school system or a community program, be sure to stay educated on concussion and injury recovery. Also, learn what community resources are available for your athletes to assist them with their healing. A concussion can be a difficult injury to recover from because we can not see healing occur, but must rely on reports from the athlete on how they are feeling and observations made during school, sports, and other activities.

You, as a coach, are a key figure in your athlete's concussion recovery. You become an essential component of their healing team which could also include doctors, the athlete's family, teachers, school nurses, athletic trainers, and physical therapists. Dedicated athletes often feel pressure to return to their sport too soon. Be sure to continue to make your athlete feel included with the team while giving them the necessary time to make a full recovery. Having a positive team culture that is supportive of any athlete recovering from injuries (concussion or otherwise) is a fantastic goal for any coach.

Staying educated on concussion management is helpful for you, your coaching staff, your athletes and their families. If you would like to learn more about current concussion management practices, we can help.

Contact us at 815-893-9075 or at www.smithptrun.com