

Graduated Return to Play Following a Concussion: Sports Competition

The return to sports progression may begin when the following criteria are met:

- All symptoms from the concussion have resolved.
- Athlete is no longer on medication to reduce symptoms.
- Athlete must be performing at their preinjury academic level.
- Approval to start the graduated return to play steps is received from the appropriate health care professional as dictated by individual state law.



Once the student has been approved to start the return to play progression, the following steps must occur:

Step 1: Light aerobic activity

Begin with light aerobic exercise to increase heart rate. This can include 15 to 20 minutes on an exercise bike, brisk walking, or light jogging; no weightlifting at this step.

Step 2: Moderate intensity activity

Continue with activities to increase heart rate with body or head movement. This includes moderate jogging, brief running, moderate-intensity stationary biking, moderate-intensity weightlifting (reduced weight and repetitions compared to normal). This also may involve easy individual non-contact sport specific skills.

Step 3: High intensity activity

Add higher intensity non-contact physical activity, such as sprinting/running, high-intensity stationary biking, regular weightlifting routine, non-contact sport-specific drills in 3 planes of movement.

Step 4: Normal practice

Athletes may return to practice and full contact, if appropriate for the sport, in controlled practice. Walk through practices are not considered normal practice.

Step 5: Competition

Athlete may return to full competition.



If symptoms return while the athlete progresses to return to sports competition, the athlete should wait 24 hours, and if the symptoms have resolved, they may then attempt the previous step that was completed without symptoms and continue the progression if symptoms do not recur.

Reevaluation by a health care professional is indicated for any athlete who has a continued return of symptoms with exertion.

American Academy
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®

Infographic is supported by Cooperative Agreement Number, NU38OT000282, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The contents of this report are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the Department of Health and Human Services.