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**Concussion Recovery 101**

**What is a concussion?**

[Concussions](https://www.healthline.com/health/concussion) are brain injuries that result from the brain hitting the skull or a strain on neural tissue due to excessive force. This force can be direct, like a hit to the head, or indirect, like whiplash in a car accident.

Concussion symptoms range from mild to severe and include:

* loss of consciousness
* [headache](https://www.healthline.com/health/headache), which may range in intensity from mild to severe
* poor memory or concentration
* sensitivity to noise, light, or both
* [dizziness](https://www.healthline.com/symptom/dizziness) or [vertigo](https://www.healthline.com/health/vertigo)
* [blurred vision](https://www.healthline.com/symptom/blurred-vision)
* sudden mood changes, including irritability, unexplained crying, or depression
* [nausea](https://www.healthline.com/symptom/nausea) or [vomiting](https://www.healthline.com/symptom/vomiting)
* [poor balance](https://www.healthline.com/symptom/poor-balance)
* [drowsiness](https://www.healthline.com/symptom/drowsiness)
* [fatigue](https://www.healthline.com/symptom/fatigue)
* reduced hearing
* trouble sleeping

While concussions can cause a loss of consciousness on impact, this doesn’t always happen. In fact, [81 to 92 percent](http://headwayfoundation.com/concussions/) of concussions don’t involve loss of consciousness. In addition, symptoms can appear anywhere from the time of impact to several days after the initial injury.

**How long does concussion recovery take?**

In most cases, concussion recovery takes about [7 to 10 days Trusted Source](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3867096/). However, if you don’t get enough rest or follow your doctor’s recommendations, recovery may take a bit longer. [Learn more about how long concussions last.](https://www.healthline.com/health/how-long-do-concussions-last)

In addition, some people develop a condition called [post-concussion syndrome](https://www.healthline.com/health/post-concussion-syndrome). Experts aren’t sure why this happens. If you have this condition, concussion recovery can take several months or even longer. During this time, you may experience a headache and other concussion symptoms as listed above.

If you’ve recently had a concussion and are still having symptoms after 7 to 10 days, make an appointment with your doctor to check for signs of post-concussion syndrome.

**How can I speed up concussion recovery?**

It’s always a good idea to check in with your doctor if you think you have a concussion. They can determine how severe your concussion is and give you more specific recovery tips.

In the meantime, try these tips to help you quickly recover from a concussion and get back to your usual activities.

**1. Reduce screen time**

Bright lights and the [eyestrain](https://www.healthline.com/health/eye-health/eye-strain) associated with looking at them can sometimes make concussions symptoms worse, especially headaches. As you recover, try to limit the amount of time you spend looking at your phone, laptop, TV, or other screens.

You can also help to counteract the sleep problems associated with concussions by avoiding screens for two hours before going to sleep.

**2. Limit exposure to bright lights and loud sounds**

After a concussion, you might notice that you’re especially sensitive to bright lights and loud sounds. You may want to try avoiding big crowds and bright fluorescent lighting for a few days while you recover. This will give your body time to heal and prevent light or sound sensitivities from getting worse.

**3. Avoid unnecessary movement of your head and neck**

Try to avoid anything that causes your head or neck to jostle around. These are the types of motions that can cause a concussion in the first place, and minimizing them gives your brain a chance to recover. While some of these motions might be unavoidable, steer clear of roller coasters and excessive physical activity for a few weeks.

**4. Stay hydrated**

There’s [preliminary evidence](http://www.uwindsor.ca/dailynews/2014-05-21/researchers-look-link-between-concussions-and-dehydration) that dehydration may increase your risk of concussion. This suggests that staying hydrated is probably a good idea while you recover too. Proper hydration is also important for your overall health, especially while your body is healing.

How much water should you be drinking? [Find out.](https://www.healthline.com/health/how-much-water-should-I-drink)

**5. Rest**

Resting may be the most important thing you can do while recovering from a concussion. Giving both your mind and body plenty of rest reduces your stress levels and helps your body recover.

Avoid any strenuous exercise for a week or so. If you want to keep exercising, try to keep it light. If you’re a runner, for example, try walking. It’s also best to avoid any heavy lifting for a week.

**6. Eat more protein**

A [2015 studyTrusted Source](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4378292/) found that [branched-chain amino acids](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/bcaa), which are the building blocks of proteins, may improve some of the cognitive symptoms of a concussion. As you recover, try to eat plenty of protein. Meats, beans, nuts, and fish are all great sources of branched-chain amino acids.

**7. Eat foods rich in omega-3s**

Omega-3 fatty acids have also been  linked to improving both cognition and the recovery of neurons in concussions sustained by mice in a lab setting. They’re also good for [overall health](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/17-health-benefits-of-omega-3), so there’s plenty of benefit to incorporating them in your diet.

Foods rich in omega-3s include fatty fish, such as salmon, walnuts, flax seeds, soy, and chia seeds. You can also take fish oil supplements, available on [Amazon](https://amzn.to/2K4qSuI?correlationId=eca30240-1d23-44ae-abd4-20e3ac58327c), to increase your omega-3 intake.

**8. Eat foods with lots of antioxidants**

[Some research Trusted Source](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4962567/) suggests that [antioxidants](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/antioxidants-explained) may improve memory and overall neural functioning. They haven’t been linked specifically to recovery after a concussion, however.

**9. Be patient**

Try to resist the urge to jump right back into your usual daily activities. This can be especially hard if your symptoms come and go. However, taking it easy for a week will help you get back to your everyday life faster.

Try to use this time to catch up on sleep and reduce your overall stress.

**10. Follow all your doctor’s orders**

Your doctor will likely give you some additional recovery tips. These might include waking yourself up regularly during the first night or taking some time off work.

If headaches are a component of your concussion, your doctor may prescribe medications to treat them.

They can also tell you about signs to watch for and guide you on when it might be a good idea to head to the ER.

**Are there any symptoms I should watch out for?**

Most concussions resolve on their own without any lasting effects. However, some concussions can accompany a more serious injury that requires treatment.

Seek emergency treatment if you notice any of the following after a concussion:

* sudden, intense headaches
* difficulty talking or finding the right words
* tingling or [numbness](https://www.healthline.com/symptom/numbness)
* [difficulty swallowing](https://www.healthline.com/health/difficulty-in-swallowing)
* lethargy
* unusual sense of taste
* loss of consciousness
* seizures
* weakness in the arm or leg
* increased heart rate
* double vision
* loss of balance
* [paralysis](https://www.healthline.com/health/paralysis) in any part of the body, including only one side of the face

To be safe, it’s best to talk to a doctor after sustaining any type of head injury. If it’s serious, your chances of making a full recovery are much better if you seek early treatment.

**How Long Do Concussions Last?**

**Overview**

A concussion is an injury that causes the brain to move suddenly and quickly inside your head. Concussion symptoms can last anywhere from a few days to a few months, depending on the severity of the injury. [Concussions](https://www.healthline.com/health/concussion) usually follow trauma to the head, but they can occur if a blow to the body is hard enough to cause the head to move in a violent manner. A concussion is a serious injury because it affects the health and function of brain cells.

**Types of concussions**

Concussions are sometimes [graded](https://www.uwsp.edu/stuhealth/Documents/Other/Head%20Injury%20-%20Concussion.pdf) on the severity of their symptoms:

* **grade 0:** headache and difficulty concentrating
* **grade 1:** headache, difficulty concentrating, and a dazed feeling for less than a minute
* **grade 2:** grade 1 symptoms, with a longer period of feeling dazed, possibly accompanied by dizziness, confusion, amnesia, ringing in the ears, and irritability
* **grade 3:** loss of consciousness for less than a minute
* **grade 4:** loss of consciousness for longer than a minute

Returning to very limited activities following a grade 0 or 1 concussion may be allowable within a day or two. A grade 2 headache may require a few days of rest. A grade 3 or 4 concussion will mean at least a few weeks of recovery time. Regardless of the severity of your concussion, you should be symptom-free before returning to normal activity, and your condition should be carefully monitored by your doctor.

In 2013, the [American Academy of Neurology](http://n.neurology.org/content/80/24/2250) updated its guidelines for evaluating and managing sports concussions. The organization suggested moving away from the traditional grading system and instead evaluating each concussion case individually. By doing so, doctors or trainers won’t feel outside influence when deciding when to give athletes and others the green light for returning to strenuous activity.

**Concussion do’s and don’ts**

Treating a concussion quickly and effectively is critically important. Misdiagnosing the problem or allowing someone with a concussion to put themselves in harm’s way too soon can lead to further injury and long-term complications. Proper post-concussion care can help you heal more quickly.

If you’ve experienced a concussion:

* See a doctor immediately to have your injury and symptoms evaluated. Even if they don’t seem serious, symptoms following any type of head injury should be treated as an emergency.
* Rest during the day and try to get a good night’s sleep. It’s the key to helping the brain heal.
* Stay inside in an area without a lot of bright light.
* Apply ice packs for headaches.
* Keep family or friends around you 24 hours a day for the first two days at least.
* Take only the medications your doctor has approved. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) for headache pain may be OK, but aspirin and ibuprofen (Advil) may cause bleeding problems in the brain.
* Focus on doing one thing at a time. Multitasking, like watching television while doing homework or cooking, can make you feel more distracted and lightheaded.
* Eat a light but healthy diet, especially if you are feeling nauseous.
* See your doctor for all follow-up appointments. If you are experiencing new symptoms during your recovery, see a doctor immediately.

Likewise, there are several things you should avoid doing in the days and weeks immediately after a concussion:

* Avoid returning to work or school too quickly. Refrain from doing most of your normal activities until your symptoms subside.
* Avoid activities, such as contact sports, that put you at higher risk for another head injury.
* Don’t ignore symptoms or lie about them to a trainer or doctor.
* Avoid alcohol, as it might slow your recovery.
* Don’t spend much time in front of a computer screen or television. Playing video games or even watching television that features bright lights, noise, and rapidly changing images may cause headaches and other symptoms.
* Avoid airplane travel if possible. Some people have complained of worsened concussion symptoms after a plane flight.

**Emergency signs**

If you’ve taken a blow to the head or body that causes a headache, or numbness or weakness in your limbs, see a doctor immediately. Call 911 or have someone close to you transport you to an emergency room. This is especially true if your headache continues to get worse or you are unsteady on your feet. Concussion symptoms that include repeated vomiting should also be treated as an emergency.

Other danger signs that should trigger a trip to the emergency room include:

* extreme drowsiness or the inability to be fully awakened
* inability to recognize familiar people or places
* having one pupil that is larger than the other
* fever of 100.5°F or higher
* [seizures](https://www.healthline.com/symptom/seizures) or convulsions
* slurred speech
* [abnormal behavior](https://www.healthline.com/symptom/personality-change), such as extreme confusion or irritability

**Outlook**

A concussion is a very individualized injury with no clear-cut way of determining when someone is fully recovered. Symptoms may show up immediately. Others may not appear for several days or even longer. You can have a mild concussion that doesn’t require treatment or a lot of downtime, or you may have a concussion that causes headaches or other symptoms for months.

On average, expect to take at least [two to four weeks](https://health.cornell.edu/sites/health/files/pdf-library/Recovering-from-Concussion.pdf) off from strenuous activities, including sports, while you recover. Most importantly, follow your doctor’s advice and be sure to share all your symptoms with your healthcare providers, even if it means more rest and less activity. You have only one brain, so making sure it recovers properly from a concussion is one of the smartest things you can do.

**Post-Concussion Syndrome**

**What is post-concussion syndrome?**

Post-concussion syndrome (PCS), or post-concussive syndrome, refers to the lingering symptoms following a [concussion](https://www.healthline.com/health/concussion) or a mild traumatic brain injury (TBI).

This condition is typically diagnosed when a person who has recently experienced a head injury continues to feel certain symptoms following a concussion. These include:

* dizziness
* fatigue
* headaches

Post-concussion syndrome can begin to occur within days of a head injury. However, it can sometimes take weeks for the symptoms to appear.

**What are the symptoms of post-concussion syndrome?**

A doctor may diagnose PCS after a TBI by the presence of at least three of the following symptoms:

* headache
* dizziness
* [vertigo](https://www.healthline.com/health/vertigo)
* fatigue
* memory problems
* trouble concentrating
* sleeping problems
* insomnia
* restlessness
* irritability
* apathy
* [depression](https://www.healthline.com/health/depression)
* [anxiety](https://www.healthline.com/health/anxiety)
* personality changes
* sensitivity to noise and light

There’s no single way to diagnose PCS. The symptoms vary depending on the person. A doctor may request an [MRI or CT scan](https://www.healthline.com/health/ct-scan-vs-mri) to make sure there are no significant brain abnormalities.

Rest is often recommended after a concussion. However, it can prolong the psychological symptoms of PCS.

**What causes post-concussion syndrome?**

Concussions can occur in a variety of scenarios, including:

* following a fall
* being involved in car accident
* being violently assaulted
* experiencing a blow to the head during impact sports, particularly boxing and football

It isn’t known why some people develop PCS and others don’t.

The severity of the concussion or TBI plays no role in the likelihood of developing PCS.