



**ThinkFirst-SportSmart Concussion Education and Awareness Program**

**SPORT-RELATED CONCUSSION:  
GUIDELINES FOR THE COACH/ TRAINER**

**What is a concussion?**

A concussion is a brain injury that cannot be seen on x-rays, CT scans, or MRIs. It affects the way a person may think and remember things for a short time. Concussions can cause a variety of symptoms.

**What are the symptoms and signs of concussion?**

*It is important to know that an athlete does not need to be knocked out (lose consciousness) to have had a concussion. A variety of problems may happen after a concussion, including:*

Thinking Problems	Athlete's Complaints	Other Problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Does not know time, date, place, period of game, score of opposing team, score of game</li> <li>▪ General confusion</li> <li>▪ Cannot remember things that happened before and after the injury</li> <li>▪ Knocked out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Headache</li> <li>▪ Dizziness</li> <li>▪ Feels dazed</li> <li>▪ Feels "dinged" or stunned; "having my bell rung"</li> <li>▪ Sees stars, flashing lights</li> <li>▪ Ringing in the ears</li> <li>▪ Sleepiness</li> <li>▪ Loss of vision</li> <li>▪ Sees double or blurry</li> <li>▪ Stomachache/stomach pain, nausea</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Poor coordination or balance</li> <li>▪ Blank stare/glassy eyed</li> <li>▪ Vomiting</li> <li>▪ Slurred speech</li> <li>▪ Slow to answer questions or follow directions</li> <li>▪ Easily distracted</li> <li>▪ Poor concentration</li> <li>▪ Strange or inappropriate emotions (i.e. laughing, crying, getting mad easily)</li> <li>▪ Not playing as well</li> </ul>

**What causes a concussion?**

Any blow to the head, face or neck, or a blow to the body which causes a sudden jarring of the head may cause a concussion (i.e. a ball to the head, being tackled into the ground in football).



### **What should you do if an athlete gets a concussion?**

*The athlete should stop playing the sport right away. He/she should not be left alone and should be seen by a doctor as soon as possible that day. If an athlete is knocked out, call an ambulance to take him/her to a hospital immediately. Do not move the athlete or remove athletic equipment like a helmet as there may also be a cervical spine injury; wait for paramedics to arrive.*

*An athlete with a concussion should not go back to play that day, even if he/she says he/she is feeling better. Problems caused by a head injury can get worse later that day or night. He/she should not return to sports until he/she has been seen by a doctor.*

### **How long will it take for the athlete to get better?**

The signs and symptoms of a concussion (see chart above) often last for 7-10 days but may last much longer. In some cases, athletes may take many weeks or months to heal. Having had previous concussions may increase the chance that a person may take longer to heal.

### **How is a concussion treated?**

*It is very important that an athlete does not go back to sports if he/she has any concussion symptoms or signs. Return to sport and activity must follow a step-wise approach:*

- 1) No activity, complete rest. Once back to normal and cleared by a doctor, go to step 2.
- 2) Light exercise such as walking or stationary cycling, for 10-15 minutes.
- 3) Sport specific aerobic activity (i.e. skating in hockey, running in football), for 20-30 minutes. **NO CONTACT.**
- 4) "On field" practice such as ball drills, shooting drills, and other activities with **NO CONTACT** (i.e. no hitting, no tackling, etc.).
- 5) "On field" practice with body contact, once cleared by a doctor.
- 6) Game play.

**Note:** *Each step must take a minimum of one day. If an athlete has any symptoms of a concussion (e.g. headache, feeling sick to his/her stomach) that come back either with activity, or later that day, he/she should stop the activity immediately and rest for a minimum of 24 hours. The athlete should be seen by a doctor and cleared before starting the step wise protocol again. This protocol must be individualized to the athlete, their injury and the sport they are returning to.*

### **When can an athlete with a concussion return to sport?**

It is very important that an athlete not play any sports if he/she has any signs or symptoms of concussion. The athlete must rest until he/she is completely back to normal. When he/she has been back to normal and has been seen by a doctor, he/she can then go through the steps of increasing activity described above. When the athlete has progressed through these steps with no symptoms or problems, and has received clearance from a doctor, he/she may return to play. **If you are unsure if an athlete should play, remember...when in doubt, sit them out.**

Prepared by the ThinkFirst-SportSmart Concussion Education and Awareness Committee. Last updated, May 2010.

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