

Sport and Exercise following Concussion

Return to sport before concussion symptoms have completely resolved puts you at risk of suffering a serious or potentially life threatening consequence if you suffer a further injury. Return to sport will vary between individuals and be determined by the extent of the injury, whether this is the first episode of concussion, and how rapidly symptoms resolve.

Current ACC and NZRU guidelines recommend a minimum of 3 weeks stand down from sport after concussion. Exercise programmes should not exacerbate symptoms and should be individually devised.

Why is exercise important following concussion?

Exercise improves the blood flow around the brain and body which assists recovery of the brain. Exercise is also important for general well being and should be part of your normal daily routine.

When should you start exercising?

When you are free of your concussion symptoms "at rest" and have medical clearance you can commence exercise.

How often should you exercise for?

We recommend that you exercise daily; you may find it beneficial to perform short sessions throughout the day and gradually build up to one exercise session.

How should you commence exercise?

It is likely your fitness levels will have reduced since your concussion due to reduced activity. Start with low intensity exercise such as walking, gentle cycling (exercycle) or swimming. Once you are able to perform low intensity exercise (for approximately 30 minutes) with no increase in your concussion symptoms, you can begin resistance training, jogging and ball sports. Sports involving body contact should still be avoided. Progression of your exercise intensity should be done over a period of several weeks (see below).

How long should you exercise for?

Commence with short daily sessions such as 5-10 minutes and monitor for increased concussion symptoms (like headaches, severe fatigue after the exercise etc). When you are able to exercise with no increased symptoms; gradually progress by 5 minute increments every few days, eventually reaching up to 30-45 minutes/day (or to your pre-injury exercise level). This process may take several weeks. If at any stage (for example at 25 minute walk) you start to develop symptoms then you should return back to the previous level (i.e. 20 minute walk) for a few days and then increase your exercise time again and so on.

Hydration and Nutrition during exercise

Ensure you drink before, during and after exercise so you are well hydrated when exercising. Eat a well balanced diet to ensure that you have adequate energy to complete your exercise. Carbohydrates (bread, rice, vegetables and fruits) are good energy foods.

Key Points

- Perform regular exercise to assist recovery from your concussion.
- Monitor your concussion symptoms during and after exercise.
- Increase exercise time gradually.
- Make sure you are well hydrated before, during and after exercise.

If you have any questions regarding exercise following your concussion contact your health practitioner or physiotherapist.