



NZIHf Healing from Concussion

Helpful information

Overview

If you suspect you may have a concussion, keep it simple – get assessed by a doctor promptly. Please see the accompanying document **NZIHf Concussion Policy and Return to Play** for further information, especially regarding return to play. The Federation strongly recommends that you work with a doctor and a physiotherapist during your entire recovery.

Below you will find information that will help you heal from concussion. This document is not intended to be a substitute for medical care. Here are other sources of information that also pertain to concussion:

- ACC **SportSmart: Concussion in Sport**, accessed <https://www.acc.co.nz/preventing-injury/sport-recreation/concussion-in-sport/>, 16 Jan 2024
- New Zealand Rugby, **Concussion**, accessed <https://www.nzrugby.co.nz/about-nzr/policies-regulations-and-rules/safety-and-welfare/concussion/>, 16 Jan 2024
- ACC: **Recovery advice Whakaora Tohutohu for patients**: chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.acc.co.nz/assets/im-injured/acc8319-concussion-education-sheet.pdf

Remember:

- The **minimum** stand down period for concussion per NZIHf policy and ACC guidance is 21 days,
- You must be fully recovered from your concussion in order to resume on-ice training and game play.
- The NZIHf expects that all players who have suffered a concussion will be cleared by a doctor prior to returning to contact play.

What is a concussion?

- Mild form of traumatic brain injury (mTBI).
- May be caused by a direct hit to the head, face, or neck, but also indirect trauma elsewhere.
- Most people who have a concussion are **not** knocked out when their injury occurs.
- **May result in a number of symptoms that affect how you function in everyday life.**



- Symptoms and signs may present immediately, or evolve over minutes, hours, or even a few days following the injury.
- Symptoms commonly resolve within days to a few weeks.
- Less commonly, symptoms can take longer to resolve.

Common (and temporary) symptoms of a concussion are:

Cognitive/ thinking	Feeling slowed down, confusion, difficulty with multi-tasking, concentrating and memory.
Physical	Headache, neck pain, nausea, difficulty tolerating bright light and/or loud noises.
Sleep and energy levels	Sleeping a lot, difficulty sleeping, and feeling easily tired.
Balance and vision	Feeling dizzy, off-balance, or clumsy, vision problems (e.g. blurred vision, difficulty focusing).
Emotional	Feeling angry, sad or irritated, increased anxiety.

When to seek further help:

Very rarely you may develop more serious symptoms. If you develop any of the following, please **seek immediate medical attention** (you can go to your doctor, urgent doctors, or ED).

If you are not sure what to do you can **call Healthline 0800 611 116**.

Worsening neck pain

Repeated vomiting (more than once)

Double vision

Decreasing levels of consciousness

Increasing Confusion

Seizures or convulsions

Weakness or tingling/burning in arms or legs.

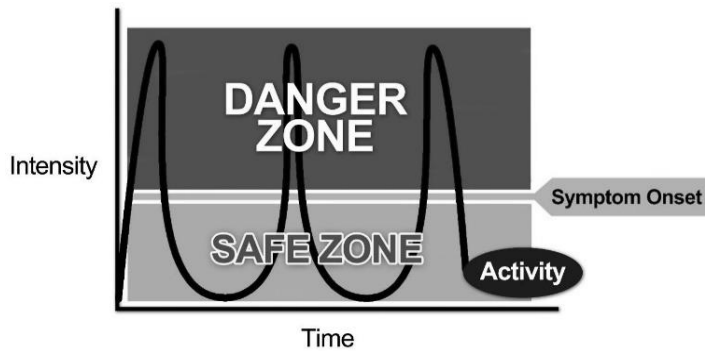
Severe or worsening headaches

General advice following concussion:

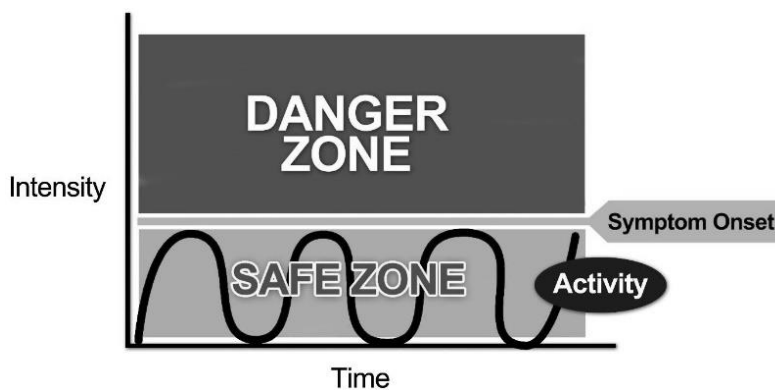
- Do not return to ice hockey until you are fully recovered (see below)
- Do not drink any alcohol or take recreational drugs. This can slow your recovery.
- Manage your symptoms –an injured brain needs rehab and recovery time.
- Try and avoid day time naps for more than 30 minutes beyond the initial stage (first few days). Sleep advice can be discussed with your healthcare professionals.
- You cannot overcome your concussion with willpower alone – be sensible, follow advice and a plan.
- A gradual return to normal life works well.
- It is important to accept help and ask for it if you need to.

Trying to ‘push through’ when you have a concussion will likely lead to an increase in symptoms:





Recognise how long you can do a particular activity (screen time, reading, physical activity etc.) and take ‘brain breaks’ before symptoms worsen. This will help minimise symptoms as you recover:



Recovery

Concussion symptoms are worse and take longer to improve when you overtax an injured brain. Time, and the following strategies are key to getting you better:

- Symptom management
- Progressive and structured activity and exercise
- Support from health care professionals and those around you

Important things to understand about your concussed brain, and how to help it:

Problem	Solution	Example
Slower brain with thinking and processing information. Pushing through makes symptoms worse!	Take regular ‘brain breaks’ as soon as or BEFORE your symptoms come on. e.g. Breaks of 5 or 10 minutes.	If you get a headache with 30 minutes of activity (such as screen time or essay writing) take a break after 20 or 25 minutes.
Difficulty multi-tasking for normal daily activities, brain unable to filter things out or	Spend more time in environments which are	Meet friends in quiet places such as park or at home



prioritise as it would normally.	lower stimulus and focus on one task at a time.	instead of busy/ noisy/ bright places such as malls or cafés.
Doing too much OR too little exercise.	A structured, progressive exercise programme helps your brain recover. Can be helpful to have a health professional guide you with this.	Start gently and progress as able – e.g. 20 minutes walking can be increased daily (with duration or speed). Don't increase further until you can complete each progression with no or minimal increase in symptoms.

Returning to School, Work, and Sport

(See the NZIHF Concussion Policy for specific guidance regarding Return to Play)

- Healthcare professionals can help guide your return to normal function with school, work and sport.
- You may need medical certificates or other documentation to support recovery.
- Concussion symptoms may make study or work difficult. A plan that helps manage your symptoms, and gives structure for a graduated, progressive return to study and work is very effective.
- **The NZIHF expects that players who suffer a concussion will obtain medical clearance from a doctor in order to return to on-ice training or games**
- There is an increased risk of further injury of any kind if you go back to contact sport before you have fully recovered.
- Full recovery means that you are back to your pre-injury level of normal life, including work and school with no ongoing symptoms.

Guidance for returning to work or study:

- A short initial rest period of 24-48 hours.
- Begin academic or work activities, but with a focus on actively managing symptoms. This means regular breaks (e.g. half hourly) and expecting to do less than normal to reduce demand and expectations on your injured brain.
- You may need to make a return to work/school plan with your doctor, and have them write a medical certificate to support this.
- You may increase work/academic activity daily **as long as it is not making you feel worse.**
- You can use your heart rate (HR) as a guide to how intense exercise is, if you have the means to track it (e.g. a fitbit etc.). Your Maximal HR (mHR) is: $220 - (\text{your age}) = \text{mHR}$. A mild exercise might be 50-60% mHR, moderate 70-80%, etc.



Developed in collaboration with the University of Otago Student Health Services and School of Physiotherapy's Acute Concussion Service April, 2024.

