

# RETURN TO PLAY: BACK TO SPORTS AFTER A CONCUSSION



## Before you begin:



An athlete's progression through the Return to Play Protocol should be monitored by a designated return to play case manager such as a coach, athletic trainer, or school nurse.



Each step should take a *minimum* of 24 hours; it should take at least one week to proceed through the full Return to Play Protocol. This process can take several weeks or months, depending on the individual and the injury.



If concussion symptoms return at any step during the return to play process, the protocol must be stopped. The athlete may only resume return to play activities when they have been symptom free for a *minimum* of 24 hours. Return to play progression must resume at the step before symptoms reemerged.

*Example: An athlete going through the Return to Play Protocol has progressed to Step 5 (practice and contact) when concussion symptoms return. Return to play activities must be halted until the symptoms stop and remain absent for at least 24 hours. At that point, the Return to Play Protocol resumes; however, the athlete restarts at Step 4 (heavy non-contact activity), the step before concussion symptoms reemerged.*

## WHEN IN DOUBT, SIT THEM OUT

**Athletes should not begin the Return to Play Protocol on the same day of the injury.** A licensed health care provider must evaluate the athlete and provide written clearance for the athlete to return to activity. Continuing to play, or returning to play too soon, after a concussion increases the chances of sustaining another concussion. A repeat concussion that occurs while the brain is still healing from the first injury can be very serious and can affect an athlete for a lifetime.

**It can even be fatal.**

# RETURN TO PLAY PROTOCOL

## STEP 1: BACK TO REGULAR ACTIVITIES



**Goal:** Complete normal activities and remain symptom free for at least 24 hours



## STEP 2: LIGHT AEROBIC ACTIVITY



**Goal:** Minimal increase in heart rate

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

Feels easy: walking  $\leq$  2 mph, stretching exercises

**NO** weight lifting, resistance training, jumping, or hard running.



## STEP 3: MODERATE ACTIVITY



**Goal:** Noticeable increase in heart and respiratory rates with limited body and head movement

**Time:** Less time than typical routine

Feels fairly easy to somewhat hard: brisk walking (15 min/mile)

**NO** head impact activities. **NO** helmet or other equipment use.



## STEP 4: HEAVY NON-CONTACT ACTIVITY



**Goal:** High-intensity activity without contact

**Time:** Close to typical routine

Non-contact training drills in full uniform, weight lifting, resistance training, running, high-intensity stationary cycling.



## STEP 5: PRACTICE AND CONTACT



**Goal:** Return to practice, full contact as applicable to sport



## STEP 6: RETURN TO PLAY



**Goal:** Return to full game play, practice, and competition



**Learn more:** [concussion.health.ok.gov](https://www.concussion.health.ok.gov) | 405.426.8440

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