

CONCUSSION

A fact sheet for Rugby League coaches

What is a concussion?

A concussion is a brain injury that can occur in any sport, particularly where this is full body contact. Concussion can be caused by the impact of force (a blow) to a part of the body not necessarily the head directly.

Recognizing a possible concussion

To help recognize a concussion, watch for the following two events among your players during both games and trainings:

1. A forceful blow to the head or body that results in rapid movement of the head;
-AND-
2. **Any change** in the player's behaviour, thinking or physical functioning (see signs and symptoms).

The Facts

- A concussion is a brain injury.
- All concussions are serious.
- Concussions can occur without loss of consciousness or other obvious signs.
- Concussions can occur from blows to the body as well as to the head.
- Concussions can occur in *any* sport.
- Recognition and proper response to concussions when they first occur can help prevent further injury or even death.
- Players may not report their symptoms for fear of losing playing time.
- Players can still get a concussion even if they are wearing headgear.

Signs and Symptoms

It is important to remember that not every sign and symptom will be present with every concussion and some may have a delayed onset

Physical signs (what you may see)

- Loss of consciousness or delayed responsiveness.
- Lying on the ground not moving or slow to get up.
- Loss of balance / co-ordination.
- Disorientation / confusion.
- Visible injury to the face or head (especially in combination with any other signs).
- Seizure or convulsion.
- Vomiting

Clinical signs (what they may feel)

- Blurred vision.
- Neck pain
- Headache or "pressure" in head.
- Nausea or vomiting.
- Balance problems or dizziness.
- Double or blurry vision.
- Sensitivity to light.
- Sensitivity to noise.
- Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy or groggy.

- Concentration or memory problems.
- Confusion.
- Does not "feel right."

Recognise & Remove

- It is important to take action and to get help if you suspect a concussion.
- Use the **Concussion Recognition Tool (CRT)** to assist you in the recognition of a concussion.
- Remember that any player with a suspected concussion **MUST NOT RETURN TO PLAY ON THE SAME DAY**
- All suspected concussions **MUST** be seen by a medical doctor for further assessment immediately. This can be through their General Practitioner, a Concussion Clinic or at the local Emergency Department.

Concussion Management

- Assessed by a medical doctor on the day of the concussion
- Physical and cognitive rest until all symptoms resolve
- Graduated stepwise progressive programme for both physical and mental activity
- Full medical clearance before return to full game activities

Concussion Considerations

- Every concussion is unique so some people may need longer to recover.
- Child and adolescent concussions may not present the same so extra caution is required.
- Return to work / school and social activities should be achieved **BEFORE** return to sport/activity.

**Recognise & Remove:
When in doubt, sit them out.**

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If you think one of your players has sustained a concussion:

Take the player out of the match or training environment immediately and allow adequate time for evaluation by a health care professional experienced in evaluating for concussion.

Any player, who exhibits signs, symptoms or behaviours consistent with a concussion, either at rest or during exertion, should be **removed immediately from training or match competition** or should not return to play until cleared by an appropriate health care professional.

Level		Activity	Objective of each stage
1	No Activity	Avoid all physical and mental exertion including the use of technology (e.g. use of cell phones, computers, reading, watching TV, PlayStation etc.)	Recovery
2	Light Aerobic Exercise	Walking, swimming or stationary bike. Keep intensity of exercise very low/easy. NO resistance training	Increase heart rate
3	Sport Specific Exercise	Sport specific training (e.g. general fitness activities)	Add movement
4	Non-contact training drills	Progression to more complex training drills e.g. passing drills	Exercise, co-ordination and cognitive load
5	Full contact Practice	Following medical clearance by a Doctor or Sports Medicine Specialist can participate in normal training activities	Restore confidence and assess functional skills by coaching staff
6	Return to Play	Normal sporting activities	Full return to sport

If a concussion is suspected:

1. **No return to play on the same day.** Look for the signs and symptoms of concussion if your player has experienced a blow to the head. Do not allow the player to just “shake it off.” Each individual player will respond to concussions differently.
2. **Ensure that the player is evaluated right away by an appropriate health care professional.** Do not try to judge the severity of the injury yourself. Immediately refer the player to the appropriate health professional, such as a team physician or health care professional experienced in concussion evaluation and management.
3. **Allow the player to return to play only with permission from a health care professional with experience in evaluating for concussion.** Allow medical staff to rely on their clinical skills and protocols in evaluating the player to establish the appropriate time to return to play. A return-to-play progression should occur in an individualized, step-wise fashion with gradual increments in physical exertion and risk of contact.
4. **Develop a game plan.** Players should not return to play until all symptoms have resolved, both at rest and during exertion. Many times, that means they will be out for the remainder of that day. In fact, as concussion management continues to evolve with new science, the care is becoming more conservative and return-to-play time frames are getting longer. Coaches should have a game plan that accounts for this change.

For further information relating to the management of suspected concussion please see the New Zealand Rugby League Concussion Policy

**Recognise & Remove:
When in doubt, sit them out.**