



After a Concussion: When to Return to School

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has developed the following guidance on when children with a concussion should return to school and learning. After a concussion, it is common for many parents and coaches ask when their child/athlete can return to their sport or to recreational activities. However, it is also important to for parents to remember that children are “students” first and “athletes” second.

How Concussions Affect Learning

A concussion is an injury that (usually only) temporarily disrupts the normal function the brain. A concussion will usually disrupt a child’s ability to:

- Think
- Concentrate
- Remember
- Be efficient at processing and learning new school material

When to Return to School?

The first few days following a concussion, when the brain is still healing, a child may be too symptomatic to attend school. Brain cells repair themselves daily, so the effects of the concussion should lessen and become more tolerable and manageable with time. When this happens, a child is encouraged to go back to school.

Following a concussion, it can be very difficult for a healthcare provider to know exactly when a child is ready to return to school. For example, if a healthcare provider sees a child on a Thursday she/he may or may not be ready to return to school on Monday morning. Therefore, it is important for parents and healthcare providers to watch a child’s symptoms to determine when to return to school.

It is not necessary for a child to be 100% symptom-free before returning to school.

When concussion symptoms have lessened and are tolerable for up to 30 to 45 minutes, a child should return to school. This will usually happen within a few days/within the first week of the concussion.

Returning to School Does Not Mean Returning to Play!

In order to reduce the risk of another brain injury, a child must be removed from the following upon returning to school:

- All school and club sports
- Physical education (PE) class
- Dance class
- All physical play at recess

In addition, teachers should reduce cognitive demands.

Concussion Recovery Time

Children need an average of 3+ weeks recovery time after a concussion.