

fact sheet

Queensland Paediatric Rehabilitation Service

Returning to sport after a head injury

After a head injury, your child may wish to return to sport and physical activity as soon as possible. It is important to ensure the return to sport is done safely and in a gradual manner. Always ask the rehabilitation team or consult your doctor for help making decisions regarding return to recreational activities.

Repeated injuries

Recurrent head injuries (even mild ones) are more likely to lead to long-term problems in concentration, memory and learning. Returning to sport and activity too early may place your child at greater risk of repeated injury.

Factors to consider

When a child can safely return to sport depends on many factors including:

- Age, previous medical history or learning problems
- Type and severity of head injury
- Problems or impairments from the injury such as:
 - muscle weakness or tightness
 - coordination and balance
 - vision and visual perception
 - judgement and impulsiveness
 - fatigue — physical and mental
- Type of sport and risk for further injury:
 - lower risk activities—walking, jogging, supervised swimming, yoga, non-contact martial arts.
 - higher risk activities—contact sports (rugby, AFL, soccer, netball, basketball) and high speed activities (trampolining, skateboarding, motorbike riding).
 - Remember that team sports can become more competitive with age and may pose a greater risk of further injury. If in doubt please ask your doctor and treating team.

Contact us

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When can my child return to sport?

For mild head injuries

For children with mild head injuries (concussion, brief loss of consciousness, brief loss of memory after the accident, uncomplicated skull fracture) we recommend the following:

- Return to non-contact and low-risk activities only when symptoms (such as headache and fatigue) have settled.
- Take normal safety precautions (i.e. wearing helmets).
- Children should not return to sports until they have successfully returned to school.
- Contact sports should be avoided after a head injury until given clearance by your doctor.

Refer to the below table to guide your child's safe return to sport once all symptoms have cleared. Once your child is fit to start sport again, return should be gradual. Each stage should take at least 24 hours.

Gradual return	Activity
Day 1	Light aerobic exercise — walking, supervised swimming, exercise bikes. No resistance training.
Day 2	Basic sports exercises—running drills, ball skills. No activities that could involve head impact.
Day 3	Non-contact training drills — passing drills, progressive resistance training.
Day 4	Full-contact practice — normal training activities.
Day 5	Return to play — back to normal game play.

Note: If symptoms recur at any stage, return to the previous step.

For severe head injuries

For children who have suffered a more severe head injury we recommend a longer period away from activities that place a child at risk.