

After a Concussion:

RETURN-TO-WORK STRATEGY



Parachute
Concussion Series

A concussion is a serious injury, but most people recover fully if their brain is given enough time to rest and recuperate.

Returning to your regular activities, including work, is a step-wise process that requires patience, attention, and caution.

In the Return-to-Work Strategy:

- ▶ Each stage is at least 24 hours.
- ▶ Move on to the next stage when you tolerate activities without new or worsening symptoms.
- ▶ If any symptoms worsen, stop and go back to the previous stage for at least 24 hours.

Stage 1: Initial cognitive and physical rest

After being diagnosed with a concussion, start with a short period of rest for 24 to 48 hours. Stay at home in a relaxing environment. Try simple activities such as drawing or listening to quiet music.

Stage 2: Light cognitive and physical activity

Add light activities, as long as they don't make your symptoms worse. Try simple chores at home, going for short walks, reading and using a screened device, such as a computer or tablet, for short periods. Be sure to take breaks and try to maintain a regular sleep schedule.

Stage 3: Prepare to return to work

Add more cognitive activity, and for longer periods of time, as tolerated. Continue building up your physical activity, such as running regular errands,

gardening, jogging and light exercise. You can try your work commute to see how it makes you feel.

Contact your workplace to develop your individual, gradual return to work plan. The plan should consider the number of days and hours you will work, your workload, and your work environment (such as lighting and noise).

Stage 4: Reduced working hours with accommodations

Begin your return to work based on your plan. Use the accommodations you need, such as a quiet work station and regular breaks. Gradually increase working hours as long as your symptoms do not return or get worse.

Stage 5: Regular working hours with accommodations

Gradually decrease accommodations as tolerated. Be aware of how much energy you have left after the work day for household and social activities.

Stage 6: Return to work

Full return to your regular work schedule without accommodations.

Important: If the work you do can put your safety or the safety of others at risk, get medical clearance before returning to those tasks. Examples include operating heavy machinery, driving for long periods of time or working at heights.



How long does this process take?

Each stage is a minimum of 24 hours, but could take longer, depending on how activities affect the way you feel. Return to work can also vary depending on the type of work you do and how physically or cognitively demanding it is.

As you go through the process, it is typical to feel better some days and worse on others. You may have to go back a stage more than once, but know that this is common during recovery.

Since each concussion is unique, people will progress at different rates. It's important that you and your workplace don't compare your recovery to another person's.

What if my symptoms return or get worse during this process?

You do not need to be symptom-free to return to work. But if, at any stage, your symptoms get worse or symptoms that had gone away come back, you should return to the previous stage for at least 24 hours. Continue with activities that you can tolerate.

Fully returning to work before you are ready can make your recovery last longer and put you at higher risk of sustaining another concussion. Remember, symptoms may return later that day or the next, not necessarily during the activity.

How long will it take me to get better?

For most adults, symptoms improve within two weeks. If you have had a concussion before, you may take longer to heal the next time.

If your symptoms are not getting better after two weeks, your doctor should consider referring you to a medically-supervised multidisciplinary concussion clinic. Depending on your individual symptoms, you might see a variety of licensed professionals, such as a physiotherapist, occupational therapist or physiatrist (a doctor trained in rehabilitation medicine).

Additional Resources

- [Concussion Awareness Training Tool \(CATT\) for Workers & Workplaces](#)
- [Find more concussion information at \[parachute.ca/concussion\]\(https://parachute.ca/concussion\)](#)

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