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## RETURNING TO LEARNING (RTL) AFTER CONCUSSION

### WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BRAIN AFTER A CONCUSSION?

When someone gets a concussion, their brain gets **shaken up** — not in a way you can see on a scan, but deep down at the **tiny cell level**.

#### What happens?

- The brain's cells and nerves get a bit **banged up**.
- There's a **chemical mess** going on inside — things aren't working like they should.
- **Signals** between brain cells aren't being sent properly.
- The brain struggles to get the **energy** it needs to do its job.

#### Think of it like this:

The brain is like a phone with low battery. You're trying to run lots of apps (like schoolwork or thinking hard), but the phone's lagging and overheating. Trying to "push through" makes it worse.

#### This leads to symptoms like:

- Trouble concentrating
- Feeling tired quickly
- Struggling to learn or remember things

#### Why this matters in school or university:

You can't see these brain changes, so it's easy for teachers or lecturers to forget that the brain needs **real rest**, just like an injured ankle or muscle.

Physical rest gets more attention, but **mental rest is just as important** for healing the brain.

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR STUDENTS?

### **A recovering brain needs a break**

After a concussion, the brain isn't working at full power. So, it's totally normal for students to:


- Struggle with **learning new things**
- Have a hard time **remembering stuff** they once knew
- Feel **overwhelmed** in class or during tests


### **Too much too soon = more problems**

Piling on schoolwork, writing tests, and doing big assignments too soon can:

- Make **symptoms** come back or get **worse**
- **Slow down** recovery
- Leave you feeling more **frustrated**

Think of it like this:

 A pulled hamstring can't go straight back to sprinting — it needs time to heal.

 The brain is no different. It also needs time to slowly ease back into learning.

### **Everyone's recovery looks different**

There's no "one-size-fits-all" plan. Doctors, teachers, and lecturers should **work together** to support each student in a way that matches their unique needs.

### **Finding the right balance**

Yes, rest is important. And getting back to work might lead to some symptoms; this can be expected. But falling too far behind in school can also be **stressful**, which isn't good for the brain either.





It's all about finding that sweet spot:

- Do a little bit at a time
- Take regular breaks
- Stop when symptoms pop up
- Do some light exercise (go for a walk, gently ride a stationary bike)

## **How long does it take?**

Most students feel able to function within **a few days**, but it may take up to **3 weeks**.

If it's taking longer, it might be time to check in with:

-  Your Doctor
-  A Neuropsychologist
-  A Physiotherapist
-  An Optometrist

## **HOW TO HELP YOUR BRAIN HEAL AT HOME**

Your brain is like a battery — after a concussion, it needs time to **recharge**. Here's how to give it the best chance to recover while you're at home:

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### **First 48 hours = Chill mode**

- Go easy on things like texting, gaming, social media, or binge-watching.
- A little is okay — just don't overdo it.

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### **Keep it simple**

- Only do brain-heavy stuff if it's essential (like light homework or quick reading).
- Save the big projects and late-night study marathons for later.

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### **Create a calm study space**

- Find a **quiet spot** with **low lighting** — your brain will thank you.
  - Avoid noisy or bright environments while studying or reading.
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## **Take breaks often**

- Every 20 minutes, **step away** for a breather.
  - Even just stretching or closing your eyes for a bit helps.
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## **Stay organised**

- Make a **to-do list** for the day so you don't get overwhelmed.
  - Break big tasks into smaller chunks.
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## **Track your symptoms**

- Let your doctor know if your symptoms get worse or show up after studying or concentrating.
- This helps them adjust your recovery plan if needed.

## **AT SCHOOL OR UNIVERSITY:**

### **How to Make It Easier on Your Brain**

Going back to school after a concussion can be tough — but with a few smart adjustments, you can ease back in without making things worse.

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### **Still feeling rough? Take time off**

If you've got symptoms like:

- Headaches
- Sensitive eyes
- Nausea
- Dizziness

 Take the **first 48 hours off** school or varsity to rest.

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## **Ready to return? Test your brain first**

Before going back, check if you can handle **30–45 minutes** of reading or studying without your symptoms getting worse.

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## **Talk to your people**

Let these folks know what’s going on:

- Teachers or lecturers
- School nurse or psychologist
- Head teacher or course coordinator

They can help support you!

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## **Do less, but do what matters**

- Cut down on your class load.
  - Focus on the most important subjects first.
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## **Take “brain breaks” during the day**

- Schedule short breaks into your school or varsity day to **rest and recharge**.
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## **Avoid the chaos**

- Stay away from **bright lights** and **noisy spots** if they make your symptoms worse.
  - Avoid drinking alcohol.
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## **Ask for help**

- Get a classmate to **take notes** for you.
  - Ask for **extra time** on tests or assignments.
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## **Loop your doctor in**

- Ask your doctor to **update your teachers or lecturers** — and even your coaches — on your recovery and what you should/shouldn't be doing.

## **FINALLY – HEALING WORKS BEST AS A TEAM EFFORT**

Concussion recovery isn't something you should tackle alone — especially when you're young and in a busy learning environment that can **stress out an already tired brain**.

Recognising this is the first step to getting better.

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## **After a thorough medical assessment, the best results happen when everyone works together:**

- **You** (the student/player)
- **Parents**
- **Coaches**
- **Teachers / Lecturers**
- **School nurses / Psychologists**
- **Doctors or medical staff**

When everyone's on the same page, it's way easier to **spot problems early**, make smart adjustments, and help you **heal properly**.

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## **The goal? A slow, safe return to:**

-  **Learning** — without overwhelming your brain
-  **Sports or training** — when it's safe to do so

Recovery isn't a race. With the right support crew, you'll get back to doing what you love — **the right way, at the right time**.

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## Want to learn more about how we manage sport-related concussions?

### Check out these resources:

 [sportsconcussion.co.za](https://sportsconcussion.co.za)






 [neuroflex.io](https://neuroflex.io)







 [yourbrainhealth.net](https://yourbrainhealth.net)

## REFERENCES:

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- Echemendia RJ, Burma JS, Bruce JM, et al. Acute Evaluation Of Sport-Related Concussion And Implications For The Sport Concussion Assessment Tool (Scat6) For Adults, Adolescents and Children: A Systematic Review. Br J Sports Med 2023; 57:722–735.
- World Rugby Player Welfare <https://playerwelfare.worldrugby.org>
- NCAA Concussion fact sheet for students:  
[http://fs.ncaa.org/docs/health\\_safety/confactsheetsa.pdf](http://fs.ncaa.org/docs/health_safety/confactsheetsa.pdf)

## IMPORTANT CONCUSSION CONTACTS

 **Who**       **Name**       **Tel No.**       **After-Hours**       **Email / Website**

 Doctor				
 Hospital				
 School / Club Nurse				
 BokSmart SpineLine (ER24)	—	<b>0800 678 678</b>	<b>0800 678 678</b>	<a href="http://www.boksmart.com">www.boksmart.com</a>
 Sports Concussion SA	—	<b>011 304 7724</b>	<b>082 574 6918</b>	<a href="http://www.sportsconcussion.co.za">www.sportsconcussion.co.za</a>  <a href="mailto:sportsconcussion@mweb.co.za">sportsconcussion@mweb.co.za</a>