

Recovering from a Concussion: Discharge Instructions

What is a concussion?

A **concussion**, also known as a **mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI)**, is a type of injury when a force causes the brain to move within the skull. This brain movement disrupts normal brain function, causing symptoms. The severity of a brain injury is usually based on:

- How long you lost consciousness (passed out)
- How long you were confused (not knowing where you are or why you are there)

A brain CT scan or MRI are often not needed to diagnose a concussion, but we may use them to determine if there was a more significant brain injury.

What are the signs and symptoms of a concussion?

- 8 out of 10 patients with a concussion show some symptoms during the first week to a month after the injury. These symptoms can include:
 - Trouble concentrating
 - Irritability (getting easily annoyed or upset)
 - Fatigue (tiredness)
 - Depression or anxiety
 - Memory problems
 - Mild headaches
 - Dizziness
 - Nausea
 - Trouble sleeping
 - Changes in appetite
- These symptoms are normal and expected after a concussion, so we don't consider them signs of permanent damage or other medical issues.
- Most patients with concussion will have some of these symptoms and recover completely in a week to a month. Symptoms often improve

without any special treatment. Recovery is usually faster when a patient gets enough rest toward the start of their recovery and then slowly returns to their regular activities.

What could be signs of a more serious brain injury?

The following symptoms are rare after a concussion and may be a sign of a more concerning brain injury. **Immediately return to the emergency room (ER) if you have any of these symptoms:**

- Very severe headache
- Vomiting that won't stop or go away
- Arm or leg weakness
- New loss of consciousness after leaving the ER
- Seizures
- Not being able to understand a conversation or speak
- New changes in vision
- Clear fluid coming out of your ears or nose
- Bleeding from your ears

We also recommend telling your trusted friends and family members if you're having any concerning symptoms.

How long will my symptoms last?

The quickest recovery happens in the first week after concussion. Most patients will be back to normal in a week to a month. People under the age of 40 tend to heal a bit faster, but everyone recovers differently.

What can I do about my symptoms?

- Some patients who have had a concussion find that it is hard at first to do their daily activities, their job, their schoolwork, get along with

everyone at home, or relax. Pace yourself (do a little, rest a little, do a little, rest a little, etc.) and be sure to get all the rest you need in the first 1-2 weeks after your injury.

- Ignoring your symptoms and trying to “tough it out” often makes the symptoms worse. **Studies show that relaxing at home for several days to a week after your concussion, and then slowly increasing your activities over the next week, is best for most patients.**
- If you can, try to do light aerobic exercise (walking or slow jogging) 48 hours after your injury. You can slowly increase your exercise intensity as tolerated over the next few weeks.
- It is important to remember that some symptoms are a normal part of recovery, and they typically go away on their own. Also, some of the symptoms you notice may have nothing to do with your concussion. Concussion symptoms are very similar to the symptoms of day-to-day stress.

What are other ways I can care for myself at home?

- You may take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) as needed for your headache.
- Take your medications as prescribed and follow up with your doctor if your symptoms get worse.
- Sleep is extremely important for brain recovery. Make sure you get at least 6-8 hours of sleep at night.
- Do not drink alcohol or use tobacco, as it can slow your recovery.
- Avoid contact sports and activities that involve heights or fast-moving objects for at least 2-4 weeks. Check in with your trainer or coach to make sure you are ready to return to playing organized sports.
- Always wear helmets during activities that put you at higher risk for a concussion (like football, skiing, biking, rollerblading, etc.).
- Follow your doctor’s instructions about driving and operating other motor vehicles.

What are some suggested short-term accommodations while I'm recovering from a concussion?

Depending on what symptoms you're having, you may have trouble in school or at work. **Short-term accommodations**, or small temporary changes in your behavior or environments, can be useful while you're still recovering. Read through the table below for suggested short-term accommodations based on your physical, cognitive, and emotional symptoms:

Physical symptoms (affecting your body)		
Symptom	How can this impact you at school or work?	Suggested short-term accommodations
Headache	Trouble concentrating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take frequent breaks and pace yourself. • Go to a quiet area. • Drink water and stay hydrated.
Fatigue (tiredness)	Decreased attention and concentration, having low energy, or feeling overwhelmed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take frequent breaks and pace yourself. • Go to fewer classes or decrease your work commitments for the first few days, and then slowly increase.
Sensitivity to light or noise	Symptoms (like headache) getting worse, feeling overwhelmed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit the time you spend in busy areas for a few days, and then slowly increase.
Dizziness or issues with balance	Feeling unsteady when walking, or the room feels like it is spinning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use elevators or lifts (if they're available). • Allow for extra travel time between classes • Work from home for first few days, then slowly increase your walking and stair climbing.

Cognitive symptoms (affecting your mind)		
Symptom	How can this impact you at school or work?	Suggested short-term accommodations
Trouble concentrating	Limited focus on work or schoolwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease your workload. • Take frequent breaks. • Give yourself more time to complete your work. • Find a quiet area to work in for first few days.
Trouble remembering things	Forgetting instructions, things people said to you, things you read, and thoughts during tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request written instructions and having information repeated to you for the first few days
Slow mental performance or processing speed	Not being able to keep up with your workload, slower reading, writing, and calculation, and trouble with effectively processing what people say to you	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take extra time to complete your coursework or work assignments. • Ask others to reduce or slow down the information they give you and check to make sure you understood them for the first few days.
Emotional symptoms (affecting your mood)		
Symptom	How can this impact you at school or work?	Suggested short-term accommodations
Anxiety	Decreased attention or concentration, working yourself too hard to avoid falling behind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask for reassurance and support from your employers or teachers about accommodations at work or school. • Reduce your workload for a few days, and then slowly increase.
Irritability	Not being able to handle stress related to school, work, other people, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce your activities and stressors for a few days, and then slowly increase.

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