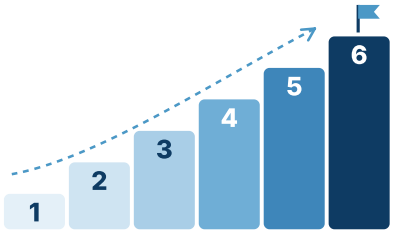
Rittenhouse
PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATES

CONCUSSION

Return to Play

A guide for athletes, parents, coaches & athletic trainers

After a concussion, athletes return to sport through a **step-by-step progression**, adding a little more physical and mental demand at each stage. A healthcare provider experienced in concussion care should oversee this process. Research shows that **light, symptom-limited activity early in recovery** helps the brain heal.



THE SIX STAGES

1 STAGE 1 — Limited Activity

Light activity that does not noticeably worsen symptoms.

EXAMPLES
Light walking, stretching, low-resistance stationary bike

NO CONTACT · NO WEIGHTS

2 STAGE 2 — Light Aerobic Activity

Goal: increase heart rate.

EXAMPLES
Brisk walking, light jogging, swimming, stationary bike, bodyweight exercises

NO CONTACT · NO WEIGHTS

3 STAGE 3 — Moderate Activity

Goal: add sport-specific movement.

EXAMPLES
Jogging, brief running, agility drills, light resistance training

NO CONTACT

4 STAGE 4 — Non-Contact Training

Goal: increase coordination and thinking demands.

EXAMPLES
Sprinting, complex and high-exertion drills, plyometrics, progressive resistance training

NO CONTACT

5 STAGE 5 — Controlled Contact Practice

Goal: rebuild confidence and let coaches and athletic trainers assess skills.

EXAMPLES
Full practice, controlled contact drills, scrimmage and game simulation

PRACTICE ONLY · NO GAMES

6 STAGE 6 · MEDICAL CLEARANCE — Return to Play

Full, unrestricted participation, including games and competition.

The treating provider must give **written clearance**, in line with state laws and regulations.

CLEARANCE LETTER REQUIRED

Key rules of the progression

- **Immediate removal from play** if an athlete is suspected to have a concussion. Seek medical attention if symptoms persist beyond 48 hours.
- **One stage at a time.** Each stage usually takes at least 24 hours; don't skip stages.
- **Simultaneous progressions.** Return to Learn and Return to Play progress at the same time, in a careful balance, during concussion recovery.

Everyone has a role

Athletes
Be honest about symptoms. Speaking up protects your season.

Parents
Monitor your child's symptoms at home and seek medical evaluation.

Coaches
Follow the current stage. No contact or games until a clearance letter is received.

Athletic trainers
Supervise each stage, track symptoms, and share progress with the treating provider.

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