Return to Work

This tool is a guideline for managing an individual's return to work following a concussion and does not replace medical advice. The goal for each stage is to find the 'sweet spot' between doing too much and doing too little. Timelines and activities may vary by direction of a health care professional.

AT HOME

STAGE 1:

Initial physical and cognitive rest

- Rest in a quiet and calm environment.
- Try activities that do not aggravate symptoms (e.g., listening to quiet music or colouring).
- Sleep as much as your body needs while trying to maintain a regular night sleeping schedule.

Limit:

- Lengthy social visits.
- Screen time (smartphone, computer, television) and reading.

Avoid:

- Sports or physical activities that increase your heart rate or cause you to break a sweat.

NOTE: It is recommended to discuss driving with a licensed medical professional for safety considerations.

Rest

When symptoms start to improve OR after resting for 2 days max, **BEGIN STAGE 2**

STAGE 2:

Light activity

- Gradually increase cognitive activity by trying simple, familiar tasks (e.g., reading, watching TV, using the computer or drawing).
- Go for walks or try other light physical activity (e.g., swimming, stationary bike, light housework), without becoming short of breath.
- Take frequent rest periods; keep napping to a minimum.
- Begin with brief periods of activity, up to 30 minutes.
- Start thinking about returning to work: communicating with the workplace, a return to work plan, and your commute.

Gradually increase activity

When 30 minutes of activity is tolerated, **BEGIN STAGE 3**

STAGE 3:

Prepare to return to work—at home

- Continue to increase cognitive activity.
- Continue to return to pre-injury physical activities (e.g., grocery shopping, gardening, jogging, light weight training).
- Contact workplace to discuss a tailored Return to Work plan.
- Attempt to commute to work to assess if it aggravates symptoms or drains energy.
- A regular sleeping schedule supports a successful return to work.
- Work your way up to 2 hours of activity, with breaks as needed.

Prepare to return to work—at work

- Work accommodations can include: flexible hours, reduced workload, extra time for tasks, access to a quiet, distraction-free work environment.
- Arrange to return to work on a graduated basis. Consider number of hours per day and appropriate accommodations.
- Work your way up to an additional 2 hours of activity, with breaks as needed.
- Have a plan to leave work and return to Stage 2 if symptoms worsen.

Prepare to return to work

When 4 hours of activity is tolerated, with breaks as needed, **BEGIN STAGE 4**

AT WORK

STAGE 4:

Begin graduated return to work

- Return to work according to your graduated return to work plan, with the agreed upon number of hours per day and accommodations.
- At work, start with less demanding activities before more difficult ones.
- Gradually increase working hours week-to-week, or sooner, as appropriate.

Return to work with accommodations and a personalized *Return to Work* plan

When ready for regular work hours with accommodations, **BEGIN STAGE 5**

STAGE 5:

Regular work hours with modifications, as needed

- Decrease accommodations as energy and capacity increases.
- Accommodations can be phased out in "trial" periods, to ensure that they are no longer needed.
- Monitor energy levels for completing household tasks and participating in social or recreational activities after the work day.

Adjust workplace accommodations, as needed

When regular work hours are tolerated with min. accommodations, **BEGIN STAGE 6**

STAGE 6:

Full return to work

- Full regular work schedule with usual expectations for productivity, without accommodations.

NOTE: Only return to job duties that may have safety implications for you or others when cleared by a licensed medical professional (e.g., operating heavy equipment, working from heights, driving).

Full return to work

Once you have **COMPLETED STAGE 6,** *Return to Work* strategy completed

Recognizing that workplace environments vary by industry and occupation, returning to work may focus more on a return to cognitive activity, physical activity, or a combination of both. It is normal to experience symptoms during recovery; you do not have to wait to be symptom free before returning to work. However, after Stage 2, if new or worsening symptoms appear at any stage, go back to the previous stage for at least 24 hours. You many need to move back a stage more than once during the recovery process.

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