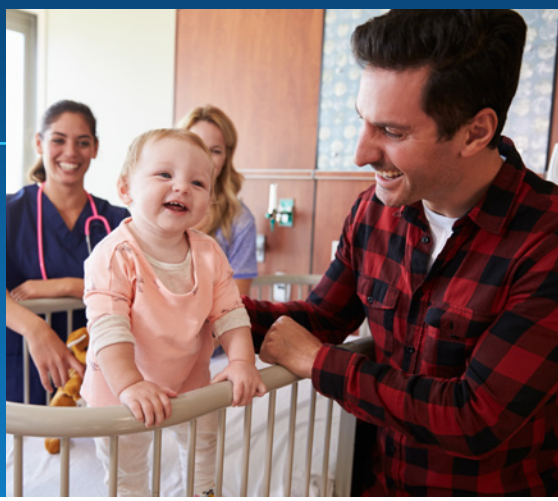
How Can I Support My Child's Recovery After a Concussion?

CDC HEADS UP
SAFE BRAIN. STRONGER FUTURE.

This guide explains concussion symptoms your child may have and offers ways to support recovery.



A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury. Most children feel better in a couple of weeks, though some have symptoms for a month or longer. Symptoms are part of normal healing and may change as your child resumes everyday activities. **Seek medical care as soon as possible for symptoms that worry you or grow worse.**



TIPS FOR CONCUSSION RECOVERY

Temporary changes to daily activities can help your child resume a normal routine sooner. Reduce these changes gradually as your child feels better. Let symptoms guide the return: an activity is OK if symptoms do not worsen; if they do, have your child cut back.

Every child and concussion is different, so recovery should match your child's symptoms. Recovery may take longer with a past concussion or other brain injury, neurological or mental health disorders, learning difficulties, or family and social stress.

AT A GLANCE

Help your child avoid activities that could cause another injury to the head or brain.

Help your child stay positive. Most children feel better within a couple of weeks after a concussion.

Help your child get enough rest.

TIPS FOR CONCUSSION RECOVERY

The chart lists possible concussion symptoms and ways to manage them. Many suggestions help more than one symptom. These temporary adjustments can support your child's recovery.



PHYSICAL

Possible Symptoms	How Your Child Might Feel or Act	Ways to Support Your Child's Recovery
Headaches	• Poor concentration • More irritability	• Arrange rest breaks at school in a quiet place • Shorten the school day if symptoms do not improve • Reduce screen use (computers, tablets, smartphones, etc.) when it worsens symptoms • If the doctor approves, give ibuprofen or acetaminophen for pain
Sensitivity to light or noise	• Symptoms increase in bright or noisy places	• Have your child wear sunglasses or a hat outdoors or around bright light or sunlight • Reduce screen use (computers, tablets, etc.) if symptoms worsen • Avoid noisy or crowded places. Earplugs or headphones may help if needed
Dizziness or poor balance	• Unsteady walking • Nausea or vomiting	• Prevent falls that could cause another head or brain injury during recovery • Avoid crowds
Fatigue	• Low energy	• Shorten the school day if symptoms do not improve • Offer quiet rest breaks at school or home during the day, as needed

THINKING OR MEMORY

Possible Symptoms	How Your Child Might Feel or Act	Ways to Support Your Child's Recovery
Attention or concentration trouble	• Can focus on schoolwork only briefly	• Shorten tasks • Divide tasks into smaller steps or activities • Reduce schoolwork or other activity • Avoid cognitive tasks (thinking or memory) that worsen symptoms
Short-term memory trouble	• Difficulty recalling instructions or holding information and ideas in mind while working	• Repeat instructions or key details • Give written notes
Long-term memory trouble	• Trouble learning new information or recalling what was learned before	• Repeat instructions or key details • Give reminders or connect information to familiar events, objects, or people • Divide information into smaller pieces
Feeling slower	• Cannot keep up with the workload • Reading, writing, or calculating more slowly • Difficulty processing spoken information	• Ask the school for more time to finish homework, assignments, and tests • Present information in smaller amounts or at a slower pace, checking understanding throughout
Foggy or groggy	• Low mental energy • Difficulty thinking clearly • Hard to form thoughts	• Include rest breaks in activities throughout the day at school or home • Set aside a quiet space at home for schoolwork and other learning

SOCIAL OR EMOTIONAL

Irritable or quick to anger	• Difficulty handling stress	• Find ways to reduce your child's stress • Offer a quiet place for rest breaks as needed • Practice deep breathing together • Encourage talking with a trusted adult or friend • Reassure your child that most people feel better soon after a concussion

Possible Symptoms	How Your Child Might Feel or Act	Ways to Support Your Child's Recovery
Anxiety or nerves	• Worries about falling behind or pressure to disregard symptoms	• Ask the school to allow more time for homework, assignments, and tests • Encourage a positive outlook: most children feel better within a couple of weeks after a concussion
Sadness or pulling away	• Avoiding school or friends due to stigma or activity limits	• Allow time to talk with and stay connected to friends • Maintain contact with teammates, even when your child cannot participate • Tell the doctor if depression concerns you
SLEEP		
More sleep than usual	• Hard to wake; changed sleep schedule	• Consider a later school start • Allow daytime rest breaks as needed • Follow a regular bedtime routine and keep sleep and wake times as consistent as possible
Less sleep than usual	• Irritable and low in energy	• Avoid screens and loud music just before bed • Sleep in a cool, dark room • Follow a regular bedtime routine and keep sleep and wake times as consistent as possible
Difficulty falling asleep	• Tired or groggy	• Reduce naps or return to the usual daytime nap routine for your child's age • Follow a regular bedtime routine and keep sleep and wake times as consistent as possible



WHAT IF MY CHILD IS NOT IMPROVING?

Tell the doctor if your child does not seem to be improving. A specialist experienced in brain injury treatment may be needed. Ask for names of local specialists.

This guide draws on *CDC's Guideline on the Diagnosis and Management of Mild Traumatic Brain Injury Among Children*. For information on the Guideline and concussion, recovery tips, and a safe return to school and sports, visit www.cdc.gov/HEADSUP.

This handout and linked sites do not replace medical or professional care. Ask your child's doctor or another healthcare provider about diagnosing or treating a concussion.