KEY INFORMATION FOR COACHES

Concussion Safety Guide



Understanding Concussion

A concussion is a mild traumatic brain injury caused by a direct head impact or a sudden force to the body that makes the head move sharply. Symptoms may appear at once or emerge over many hours.

More on concussion diagnosis, management and prevention in college athletes, including the full definition, is available **here.**

How Can I Recognize an Athlete's Concussion?

After a hit or impact, an athlete may show changes in behavior or balance, or other signs such as:

- Looks dazed or stunned.
- Cannot recall an instruction.
- Is unclear about an assignment or position.
- Is uncertain of the game, score or opponent.
- Seems less coordinated, wobbly or unsteady.
- Responds slowly to questions.
- Becomes unconscious.

The athlete may describe symptoms such as:

- Headache, head pressure or feeling unwell after a blow to the head.
- Feeling nauseated.
- Dizziness or difficulty balancing.
- Blurred or double vision.
- Sensitivity to noise or light.
- Feeling slow, hazy or foggy.
- Confusion or trouble focusing or remembering.

What If an Athlete Keeps Practicing or Competing After a Concussion?

- While symptoms remain, the brain is vulnerable and an athlete may face a higher risk of another concussion.
- Rarely, repeated head trauma can cause brain swelling, lasting brain damage or death.
- Playing on after a concussion raises the risk of other injuries as well as another concussion.
- Concussion reduces concentration and slows reactions, preventing athletes from performing at their best.
- Waiting to report a concussion may lengthen the time needed for full recovery.

How Long Does Recovery Take?

- Recovery differs for each athlete, but emerging evidence suggests that most athletes recover fully.
- Some athletes have lasting post-concussive symptoms that are managed with exercise and targeted treatment.
- Persistent symptoms may also reflect another treatable condition unrelated to the concussion. Athletes with any ongoing symptoms should seek care from the team physician.

What Should I Know About Repeated Head Impacts?

- Knowledge about the emerging concept of repeated head impacts is developing quickly.
- Most head impacts in sport involve far less force than is needed to cause a sport-related concussion.
- Medical and scientific researchers continue to study whether long-term exposure to head impacts can harm brain health.
- Many questions remain, but the NCAA Concussion Checklist advises reducing exposure to head impacts during both practices and games.

Every concussion is different. Symptoms may emerge hours after the impact, or even the following day, and may change over several days. An athletic trainer, team physician or physician designee experienced in concussion must assess every suspected concussion.

Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE)

- Research on CTE has continued in recent years, but further studies are needed to answer key questions.
- The Centers for Disease Control website states that research so far suggests CTE is linked to long-term exposure to repeated head impacts strong enough to injure the brain.
- The CDC reports no strong scientific evidence that one or more concussions, other mild traumatic brain injuries, or occasional head impacts lead to CTE.

Further research is needed to clarify:

- What causes CTE, including how repeated head impacts contribute.
- Other possible CTE risk factors, including sex, genetics, medical history, environment and lifestyle.
- How CTE pathology develops and which symptoms it may cause.
- Why CTE develops in some people but not others.

Find further information on emerging CTE research from sources such as the **CDC, NINDS** and the **Consensus Statement on Concussion in Sport.**

Key Facts

- Each season, most contact or collision teams have at least one student-athlete diagnosed with concussion.
- Your school has a concussion care plan. Team physicians and athletic trainers are expected to use it during each student-athlete's recovery.
- NCAA rules give team physicians and athletic trainers unchallengeable authority over all medical management and return-to-sport decisions for student-athletes.
- Concussion knowledge grows daily. Learn about the largest concussion study ever conducted, led by the NCAA and U.S. Department of Defense, at **ncaa.org/concussion.**



How Can I Help Athletes Stay Safe?

	Preseason	During Season	When Injured	Recovery
How can I help?	Build a team culture that supports and encourages reporting concussions.	Learn to recognize concussion signs and symptoms.	If you suspect a concussion, remove the athlete from play at once and refer them to the team physician or athletic trainer.	Use the recovery and return-to-sport protocol set by team physicians and athletic trainers.
Why it matters	Recovery takes longer when athletes delay seeking care for a possible concussion.	Concussions are more likely to be identified when more people know the signs to watch for.	Prompt removal from play may speed recovery and prevent another potentially serious injury.	Team physicians and athletic trainers are trained to apply best practices for concussion recovery.
Practical tips	Attend when your team physician or athletic trainer shares concussion education with the team. Show that this is a priority for you.	Ask your team physician or athletic trainer if you would like to learn more about concussion safety.	Respond positively when an athlete reports a possible concussion.	Explain that the team physician and athletic trainer make health decisions, including clearance for unrestricted return to sport.

You strongly influence how your team approaches concussion safety. Show that you take concussion seriously and that reporting possible concussion symptoms is a core team value.

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