



RETURNING TO SCHOOL AFTER A CONCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

Difficulties with thinking and concentration are common after a concussion or head injury. Although nearly every child returns to normal, the first few weeks can be a challenge. Talk to your teachers and work together to make some short-term changes and develop a step-wise return-to-school plan specific to you and your child. This plan can be modified as your child improves.

GRADUAL RETURN

It's important to rest after a head injury. It is no longer recommended that children and teens have long periods of inactivity or time away from school. Science has shown that they do better with **1 - 2 days of rest** followed by a gradual return to activities. Some light activities and gentle exercise should start at the same time as returning to school, but high-energy activities, sport, and gym should be postponed until school is going reasonably well unless a doctor advises otherwise.

Time at school should increase every day or two as you are able to cope. Symptoms may get worse initially; if they increase by more than 30-40% you will need to cut back a little. Take frequent 10 - 20 minute breaks to help. As recovery progresses, you can spend more time at school and reduce the amount of help and support you need.

GRADUAL RETURN

A is for Absence (no school)

One to two days of rest allows your brain to recover. Stay away from school and initially avoid all schoolwork, screen time, texting, reading, or social activities outside the house. As you start to feel better you can start doing some 'thinking' tasks like reading, short periods of screen time, and drawing. Once you can cope with a total of one hour of school work in a day (such as three 20 minutes periods of reading or maths) and have done some light exercise such as walking outside the house, you can go back to school part-time.

B is for Back to school (part-time school)

Start going back to school part-time; try half days at first. Don't attempt homework, assemblies, exams, or field trips at this stage. As you improve, increase the amount of time you spend at school. Aim for full time school by 2 weeks.

C is for Commit to Full-time School with Reduced Workload

Start to attend all classes again. Your symptoms (eg. headaches) may get worse but don't worry as this is normal. It's not uncommon to need a few breaks during the day, so go to a quiet area and rest for 20 minutes. This will help you to stay at school all day. If you have managed well the first week back full-time, start homework the following week.

D is for return to Daily Routine

Attend school as usual and do all your homework. You can now try to catch-up on any missed work. Talk to your teacher to get some advice about how to do this. It's often possible to catch up on only a portion of missed work by focusing on your core subjects. Some assignments may need to be missed completely. Some people may need extra time to complete tasks such as exams and assignments for up to 3 months after their injury.

EXTRA TIPS FOR SUCCESS

General tips:

Gradually increase your homework time, then start to take on extra-curricular activities and start to do exams.

Do not try to do it all at once. Take the time you need to go through the recovery steps and PACE YOURSELF.

- Have a key contact person at school who can share information on your behalf about the injury and your individual needs.
- Get involved in making your return-to-school plan.
- Prepare for an upcoming big day.
- Avoid noisy areas and situations and avoid excess light.
- Reduce screen brightness, and wear sunglasses outside as needed.
- Use a diary, calendar, or phone to assist you in organizing your day and help you remember things.
- Ask for extra help with your homework from your family and teacher.
- Ask your teacher for the lesson notes.
- Focus on one activity or conversation at once.

If you are still having problems with your school attendance or tasks because of your concussion 3 months after your injury, your GP will need to refer you to the Mild Traumatic Brain Injury and Complex Concussion clinic at the Queensland Children's Hospital. See the section on our website for more details.