



# Responding to a Sports-Related Concussion

## Steps to take

- Remove the injured person from sports participation right away if a concussion is suspected. “When in doubt, sit them out!”
- Check the athlete for concussion danger signs. An athlete experiencing concussion danger signs needs to go to the emergency department right away.
  - Danger signs include:
    - One pupil is larger than the other.
    - Drowsiness or inability to wake up.
    - A headache that gets worse and does not go away.
    - Slurred speech, weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination.
    - Repeated vomiting or nausea.
    - Convulsions or seizures (shaking or twitching).
    - Unusual behavior, increased confusion, restlessness, or agitation.
    - Loss of consciousness (passed out/knocked out). Even a brief loss of consciousness should be taken seriously.
- Inform cheerleader’s parents/guardians about possible concussion and give information on concussion.
- Keep the athlete out of sports participation the day of the injury and until cleared by a healthcare provider to begin the return-to-sports protocol.

**Do not** try to judge the severity of a concussion yourself. Only a healthcare provider should assess an athlete for a possible concussion. After an athlete with a possible concussion is removed from sports participation, the decision about return to sports is a medical decision that should be made by a healthcare provider.

Athletes who return to sports participation too soon—while their brain is still healing—have a greater chance of getting a repeat concussion. Repeat concussions can be very serious and can cause permanent brain damage, affecting a child for a lifetime.

## Seek medical care

An athlete with a possible concussion needs to be seen by a healthcare provider for evaluation and be cleared from a healthcare provider to return to play.

## Return to Play Protocol

Once a cheerleader no longer has symptoms of a concussion AND is cleared by an appropriate healthcare provider with a written medical clearance letter they may begin a return to play progression. On average, the cheerleader will complete a new step every 24-48 hours.

1. Back to Regular Activities: such as school.
2. Light Aerobic Activity: only to increase heart rate. Examples like brisk walking or light jogging for 5-10 minutes.
3. Moderate Activity: can continue to increase an athlete's heart rate while adding movement like running.
4. Non-Contact Training Activity: can add sports specific, more intense, non-contact physical activity.
5. Practice and Full Contact: may return to full practice in a controlled practice setting where the skills can be assessed by the coaches.
6. Competition: may return to competition.

If symptoms of concussion recur, or if concussion signs and/or behaviors are observed at any time during the return to play, the cheerleader must discontinue all activity immediately. The cheerleader may need to be re-evaluated by the appropriate healthcare professional or may have to return to the previous step of the return to play program as pre-determined by appropriate healthcare professional.