

Understanding Concussion

These recommendations are based on current expert guidelines (including NICE in the UK and the international Concussion in Sport Group). Always remember that every child can be a bit different. If you have any worries or see any concerning symptoms, do follow up with your GP or specialist.

Understanding Concussion

- **What is a concussion?**

A concussion is a type of mild brain injury that can happen when a hard bump or jolt to the head disrupts normal brain function. Even if scans (like MRI or CT) look normal, the brain may still be temporarily affected.

- **Common signs and symptoms**

- Headache
- Dizziness or feeling unsteady
- Blurred vision
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Feeling tired or more irritable than usual
- Trouble concentrating or remembering things

It's reassuring that the scans are normal, but it's still important to let the brain rest and heal.

Early Observation at Home

- **First 24–48 hours**

- Keep a close eye on your son. Check how he is feeling at intervals—make sure he's alert, can talk normally, and is generally himself.

- Encourage plenty of rest (both mental and physical). Think of the brain as needing 'quiet time'—too much activity straight away can make symptoms worse.

- Look out for any warning signs like severe headache that won't go away, repeated vomiting, confusion, or changes in behaviour. If anything is worrying, contact your doctor immediately.

- **Light activity**

- After a day or two of rest, short spells of gentle, everyday tasks (like talking with family, reading for a few minutes) are usually okay if they don't worsen symptoms.
- Keep activities calm and brief. If headaches or dizziness return strongly, it's a sign to pause, rest, and try again later.

Returning to School

- **When to go back**
 - Most guidelines suggest a gradual return to learning. If your son feels better within a few days, he can try going back to classes part-time or for half-days.
 - Let teachers know about the concussion. They can watch for signs of tiredness, trouble concentrating, or headaches.
 - If symptoms flare up—like headaches or blurred vision—reduce the workload or ask the school for rest breaks.
- **Helpful school adjustments**
 - Shorter school days or rest breaks when needed.
 - Extra time for homework or tests if he's having trouble concentrating.
 - Quiet spaces or dimmer lighting if light sensitivity is an issue.

Screen Time and Television

- **Short sessions, plenty of breaks**
 - Screen time (TV, phone, computer, or gaming) can sometimes worsen headaches or blurred vision if used too soon or for too long.
 - Start with very short sessions—maybe 10 or 15 minutes—and see how he manages. Gradually increase if there are no symptoms.
 - Use low brightness settings and take frequent breaks. If he starts feeling dizzy or has a headache, stop and rest.

Sports and Physical Activities

- **Gradual return to sport**
 - Avoid high-risk or contact sports (e.g., rugby, football) until cleared by a doctor or until he's had a symptom-free period of at least a few days.
 - Typically, guidelines recommend a step-by-step process:
 1. **Rest** (physical and mental) until major symptoms settle.

2. **Light aerobic exercise** (like gentle walking) to see how he feels.
3. **Moderate exercise** (like easy jogging) if no symptoms appear.
4. **Sport-specific drills** (no contact) when feeling well.
5. **Full-contact practice** only with medical clearance and when he's symptom-free.
6. **Return to competition** or full play as the final step, usually after at least a week or more without symptoms.

- **Listen to his body**
- If headaches or dizziness return, go back one step and allow more time to rest.
- Pushing through symptoms can make recovery longer.

Emotional Wellbeing

- **Mood changes**
- Concussions can affect emotions. He may feel irritable, sad, or anxious. Keep talking, be patient, and reassure him these feelings often pass as he recovers.
- If he already has conditions like ADHD or anxiety, recovering from concussion can be a bit more challenging. Make sure to mention these factors to doctors or school staff so they can offer the right support.
- **When to get extra help**
- If mood problems, anxiety, or behaviour changes linger or worsen, speak to a GP, paediatrician, or counsellor. Concussion can sometimes lead to mental health challenges that need proper attention.

Monitoring and Follow-Up

- **Give it time**
- Most teenagers start to feel better within a couple of weeks. Some may take a bit longer.
- Return to full activity (academics, sports, screen time) gradually—think in steps. If you're unsure, call your doctor.
- **Trust your instincts**
- If something doesn't feel right—like symptoms getting worse instead of better—seek medical advice promptly.

Encouragement for Parents

- **Stay positive**
 - Most young people recover fully from concussion with the right balance of rest and gradual activity.
 - Keep lines of communication open with teachers, coaches, and health professionals so everyone is on the same page.
- **Look after yourself too**
 - Supporting a child with concussion can be stressful. If you find it difficult to cope, reach out to friends, family, or a support group.

In Summary

1. **Rest and observation** for the first 24–48 hours.
2. **Gradual return** to school and everyday life—watch for symptoms.
3. **Limit screen time** if it triggers headaches or blurred vision. Increase slowly.
4. **Slow, careful steps** back to sports, following a doctor-approved plan.
5. **Keep an eye on mood and emotions**—seek help if changes last or worsen.
6. **Stay in touch** with healthcare professionals if you're concerned.

With patience and a gentle pace, most teenagers recover well. By following these simple guidelines—rest, gradual activity, and steady observation—you can give your son the best support for a smooth and safe return to his usual activities. If in doubt, or if any worrying signs appear, do get in touch with your doctor for further advice.