

After a concussion:

RETURN-TO-WORK STRATEGY



Parachute
Concussion Series

Returning to your regular activities, including work, after a concussion is a step-wise process that requires patience, attention and caution.

In the Return-to-Work Strategy:

- Each step is at least 24 hours.
- Move on to the next stage when you can tolerate activities.
- It is common and OK for your symptoms to worsen mildly and briefly* as you return to activities. But, if your symptoms worsen more than this, take a break and adapt activities.

*Symptom worsening should not last more than one hour.

Step 1: Activities of daily living and relative rest (first 24 to 48 hours)

For the first 24 to 48 hours after injury, you can engage in activities of daily living such as light walking and preparing meals, and social interactions at home. Try simple activities such as drawing or listening to quiet music.

Step 2: Work activities

Add light cognitive activities, such as reading, at home or at work. Take breaks and adapt activities as needed. Gradually resume screen time, as tolerated.

Contact your workplace to develop your individual, gradual return-to-work plan. The plan should consider the number of days and hours you will work, your workload and your work environment (such as lighting and noise).

Step 3: Part-time or full days at work with accommodations

Gradually reintroduce work activities. Use the accommodations you need, such as a quiet workstation, extra time to complete tasks and regular breaks. Increase your workload and working hours as tolerated. Gradually decrease concussion-related accommodations that are no longer needed. Be aware of how much energy you have left after the work day for household and social activities.

Step 4: Return to work

Full return to your regular work schedule without concussion-related accommodations.

Important: If the work you do can put your safety or the safety of others at risk, get medical clearance before returning to those tasks. Examples include operating heavy machinery, driving for long periods of time or working at heights.



How long does this process take?

Each stage is a minimum of 24 hours, but could take longer, depending on how activities affect the way you feel. Return to work can also vary depending on the type of work you do and how physically or cognitively demanding it is.

As you go through the process, it is typical to feel better some days and worse on others. You may have to try a step more than once, but know that this is common during recovery.

Since each concussion is unique, people will progress at different rates. It's important that you and your workplace don't compare your recovery to another person's.

What if my symptoms return or get worse during this process?

You do not need to be symptom-free to return to work. It is common for symptoms to worsen mildly and briefly as you return to activities. If your symptoms feel a little worse for up to one hour, this is OK. But if they feel worse for longer than that, or if they feel much worse, take a break and adapt activities.

If you receive medical clearance from a doctor, symptoms should not return afterward. If your

symptoms come back, you should be re-assessed.

Fully returning to work before you are ready can make your recovery last longer and put you at higher risk of sustaining another concussion. Remember, symptoms may return later that day or the next, not necessarily during the activity.

How long will it take me to get better?

The signs and symptoms of a concussion often last for up to four weeks but may last longer. If you have had a concussion before, you may take longer to heal the next time.

If your symptoms are not improving, your doctor should consider referring you for interdisciplinary concussion care. Depending on your individual symptoms, you might see a variety of licensed healthcare professionals, such as a physiotherapist, occupational therapist or physiatrist (a doctor trained in rehabilitation medicine).

Additional resources

Scan the QR code or visit parachute.ca/concussion



This information has been adapted from: BCIRPU. (2023). [Concussion Resources for Workers and Workplaces](#).

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