

# Concussion Do's and Don'ts: The first few days of recovery



Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation  
Fondation ontarienne de neurotraumatologie



## The individual with concussion **SHOULD**:



✓ **See a medical doctor or nurse practitioner for help**



✓ **The first 24-48 hours - physical AND mental rest!**  
Sleep at night, rest during the day.



✓ **Take it slowly returning to daily activities and sport**  
Talk with your doctor or nurse practitioner about when you can return to work, school or play.  
Respect your brain and your body. Have a conversation with your doctor or nurse practitioner about what this can look like for you.  
As you start to feel better, it's important to get back to doing your normal activities. Start by doing just a little, and if you feel okay, then you can try to do a bit more. Keep track of how you feel.



✓ **Conserve your energy**  
After a concussion, your brain has less energy to spare than it normally does. It is important to manage physical and mental energy so that your brain can fully recover.  
If symptoms return or you get new ones as you become more active, this is a sign that you are pushing yourself too hard.



✓ **Take care of basic needs**  
Eating well and regularly can improve your mood, sleep and mental focus.  
Stay away from stimulants such as coffee, caffeine, pop and energy drinks. Stimulants can put added stress on your brain.  
Keep a regular sleep schedule. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have trouble getting a good night's sleep.



✓ **Manage stress**  
Stress and emotional upset can make symptoms feel worse. Try to do things that help you relax and feel calm.  
Talk about your worries with someone you trust such as your healthcare provider, a family member or friend. Let others know how they can help you.



## The individual with concussion **should NOT**

*(until or unless your doctor or nurse practitioner says it's okay):*



✗ **Don't be woken up every hour**  
Increased sleep is normal and necessary.



✗ **Don't use electronic devices** (e.g. looking at computer, phone, tablet, TV screens)



✗ **Don't be put in a dark room to avoid all activity**  
In the past, patients were told to have absolute rest. It is now accepted that light and cautious activity can be part of the healing process. Respect your brain and your body. Have a conversation with your doctor or nurse practitioner about what this can look like for you.



✗ **Don't exercise, play sports, do heavy household chores or activities that could lead to another concussion or cause symptoms to worsen**  
Be careful in the first few days. Some people who have had repeated concussions may have serious long-term problems, including difficulty with concentration, memory, headache and sometimes physical skills (e.g. balance, coordination).



✗ **Don't return to full-time work or study**  
The demands of work or school can trigger symptoms. You may need to take some time off to rest and recover or reduce your responsibilities for a short period of time.



✗ **Don't drive, ride a bike or work with machinery or ladders**  
Reaction time, vision and thinking may be affected by a concussion. Do not drive a car until your doctor or nurse practitioner advises you it is okay.



✗ **Don't use non-prescription drugs, including alcohol**  
Using non-prescription drugs (including alcohol) may add to concussion symptoms and increase recovery time. Only take medications that your doctor has approved.