

The ACC logo consists of the letters 'ACC' in a white, bold, sans-serif font, set against a blue square background.

PREVENTION. CARE. RECOVERY.

Te Kaporeihana Awhina Hunga Whara

# CONCUSSION. RECOGNISING THE SIGNS

A step-by-step guide to concussion and your role in recognising the signs, removing players from play and referring them to a medical doctor.

**ACC**  
**SportSmart**

[accsportsmart.co.nz/concussion](http://accsportsmart.co.nz/concussion)



# WHAT IS CONCUSSION?

Concussion is a brain injury that is caused by the impact of force (a blow) to a part of the body not necessarily the head directly. You can't always see symptoms, so recognising the signs, removing players from play, and referring them to a medical doctor can keep individuals from serious injury.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD DO:

**Recognise** the signs and symptoms of concussion

**Remove** the player from play

**Refer** them to a medical doctor for assessment

# RECOGNISE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF CONCUSSION

Concussion should be suspected if one or more of the following visible clues, signs, symptoms or errors in memory questions are present.

**01 PHYSICAL SIGNS**  
(WHAT YOU SEE)

**02 MEMORY**  
(WHAT THEY SAY)

**03 CLINICAL SYMPTOMS**  
(WHAT THEY FEEL)

**04 RED FLAGS**  
(WHAT REQUIRES HOSPITALISATION)

## 01 PHYSICAL SIGNS (YOU SEE)

- Loss of consciousness or non-responsive
- Lying on the ground not moving or slow to get up
- Disorientation/confusion
- Dazed, blank or vacant look
- Visible injury to face or head (especially in combination with any other signs)
- Grabbing/clutching of head
- Loss of balance/co-ordination

## 02 MEMORY (WHAT THEY SAY)

Failure to answer any of these questions correctly may suggest a concussion.

- “What venue are we at today?”
- “Which half/quarter is it now?”
- “Who scored last in this game?”
- “What team did you play last week/game?”
- “Did your team win the last game?”

### **03 CLINICAL SYMPTOMS (WHAT THEY FEEL)**

If any of the following symptoms appear, concussion may be present.

- Blurred vision
- Neck pain
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Sensitivity to light &/or noise
- Nervous or anxious
- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Headache/pressure in the head
- Drowsiness/trouble sleeping
- More emotional
- Problems with memory
- Reduced ability to think/concentrate
- Difficulty sleeping

### **04 RED FLAGS (WHAT REQUIRES HOSPITALISATION)**

If no qualified medical professional is available, consider transporting by ambulance for urgent medical assessment.

- Player complains of neck pain
- Increasing confusion or irritability
- Repeated vomiting
- Seizure or convulsion
- Double vision
- Weakness or tingling/burning in arms or legs
- Deteriorating conscious state
- Severe or increasing headache
- Unusual behaviour change

# REMOVE THE PLAYER FROM PLAY

Any athlete with a suspected concussion should be **IMMEDIATELY REMOVED FROM PLAY**, and should not be returned to activity until they have been assessed by a medical doctor. Players with a suspected concussion should not be left alone and should not drive a motor vehicle.

To help an unconscious athlete:

- Apply first aid principles: **DRSABC** (Danger, Response, Send for help, Airway, Breathing, Circulation).
- Treat as though they have a **neck injury**.
- **ONLY be moved by a medical professional** trained in spinal immobilisation techniques.
- **Do not remove helmet** (if present) unless trained to do so.
- **Call 111** if there is concern regarding the risk of structural head or neck injury.

In cases of uncertainty always adopt a conservative approach – “If in doubt sit them out”.

# REFER THEM TO A MEDICAL DOCTOR FOR ASSESSMENT

Anyone with a suspected head injury needs to see and be assessed by a medical doctor. Only a qualified medical doctor can assess and diagnose a concussion. This is essential to confirm the diagnosis of concussion and to assess the risk for more serious injury.

It is useful to have a list of local medical doctors, concussion clinics and emergency departments close to where the sport/activity is being played. A pre-activity checklist of the appropriate services could include:

- Local medical doctors or medical centre.
- Local hospital emergency department.
- Ambulance services (111).

# WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

## REST, RECOVER & RETURN

Initial concussion management involves physical and mental rest until the acute symptoms resolve then a graduated programme of physical and mental activity, guided by a person trained in concussion management, prior to medical clearance and return to sport. Clearance by a medical doctor is required before return to sport/activity.

**Rest** until symptom-free.

**Recover** by following your medical doctor's advice and gradually becoming more active.

**Return** to the full demands of your sport when fully recovered & cleared by your medical doctor.

It is important to note that different sports have different rules and return to play guidelines. Before returning it is important to check with your sports code on the rules for your sport.

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**ACC**  
**SportSmart**

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