



# Rutland Regional Medical Center

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## **Concussions – Getting Your Head Out of the Game**

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Concussions are among the most common of sports injuries but are also among the most potentially dangerous. Also known as mild traumatic brain injuries, as many as 2 million sport-related concussions occur each year in the US. They are probably underreported because athletes don't always recognize the symptoms and even when they do, competitors don't want to sit out.

The way concussions are treated has changed dramatically based on recent research. New guidelines do not use a set time away from activity but instead emphasize a gradual return to play.

A concussion is defined medically as a complex neurological process caused by trauma that doesn't usually involve structural damage to the brain. While they often occur from direct contact to the head or face concussions may also occur from rotational forces without contact such as a tumbling fall. Symptoms may include headache, dizziness, nausea, amnesia, brief loss of consciousness, and inability to concentrate. They may last for several days and are known as Post-Concussive Syndrome.

When an athlete is thought to have a concussion, he or she should be removed immediately from competition and evaluated by a qualified medical professional as soon as possible. Symptoms should be monitored. If the symptoms are stable or improving then keeping the athlete out of action and getting medical care the next day is generally safe if medical access isn't readily available. If symptoms are worsening or not improving over several hours then immediate medical evaluation is indicated, at an emergency department if necessary. Note: both *physical and mental rest* speed the recovery of concussions. Sleeping is fine but activities such as video games or loud, crowded activities should be avoided.

Returning to play starts gradually the day the athlete is symptom free, and then it takes 3-7 days for full brain recovery. An athlete should gradually increase activity every 24 hours, with the guidance of a medical professional. Athletes must notify their coach, trainer, or physician if symptoms reappear during the recovery period.

Concussion management will continue to evolve. Removal from competition and early intervention with a medical professional knowledgeable about concussions will allow the fastest and safest return to play.