

Concussion 'If in Doubt, Sit Them Out' Concussion Management Guidelines



What is Concussion?

Concussion is a brain injury and can be caused by a direct or indirect hit to the player's head or body. Concussion typically results in an immediate onset of short-lived signs and symptoms. However, in some cases, the signs and symptoms of concussion may evolve over several minutes or hours or even days. Concussion must be taken extremely seriously as there is potential for catastrophic brain injury with children and adolescents at most risk.

The Camogie Association reaffirms its position that if there are any signs leading to a suspicion of a concussion for a player,

at any level or any age, the player should be removed immediately from play, and not return to action on the same day (the impact itself may on occasion be considered an indicator in this context, even in the absence of any immediate symptoms).

The player should be medically assessed and not return to full contact play without prior medical approval - "If In Doubt, Sit Them Out". In fact, research has shown that by withdrawing a player from play immediately following a potential concussive impact, this reduced the players' recovery time when compared with those who remained in games and required a longer spell out of action before making a full recovery.

This document sets out the Camogie Association, GAA and LGFA Guidelines in relation to Concussion Management. The following recommendations are not protocols or a clinical standard of care.

Summary Principles

- Concussion is a brain injury that needs to be taken seriously to protect the short and long-term health and welfare of all players.
- If there are any signs leading to the suspicion of concussion, a player should be removed immediately from the field of play pending a full medical assessment (the impact itself may on occasion be considered an indicator even in the absence of any immediate symptoms). A player suspected

of having sustained a concussion should not return to play on the same day. Subsequently a satisfactory, supervised return to play protocol must be completed, followed by medical approval, prior to return to play. If In Doubt, Sit Them Out.

- Where a Team Doctor is present, he/she must advise the person in charge of the team (i.e. Team Manager) in this regard and the player must not be allowed to continue their participation in the game.
- Concussion diagnosis is a clinical judgement – Use of the SCAT 5 can aid the doctor in his/her diagnosis. If a full SCAT 5 assessment has been deemed necessary, the player should not return to play on the day.
- Concussion is an evolving injury. It is important to monitor the player after the injury for 24-48 hours.
- All players suspected of having a concussion, must have adequate rest (no activity) of at least 48 hours and then must follow a gradual return to play (GRTP) protocol. Players must receive written medical clearance (from a doctor) and present to the person in charge of the team before returning to full contact training. Players should not return to full contact training/matches for at least 15 days from when the injury has first been diagnosed. (It is recommended that the GRTP should take at least 14 days.)
- Over the past decade, there is evidence to suggest that female players can be more susceptible to concussion. There is also evidence to suggest that recovery can take longer, and female athletes can also be more prone to second impact syndrome, which is potentially fatal in particular during adolescence (Dick, 2009; Collins & Kontos, 2016). In the interest of their long-term welfare, camogie and ladies football players are advised to follow the GRTP protocol.
- A graduated return to school/ education strategy is also necessary. Communication between the doctor, parents and teachers is essential so that a flexible individualised plan allowing incremental progression from daily activities, school activities, return to school part time and return to school full time be implemented. No player should return to competitive sporting activity prior to being cleared to return to school.
- The vast majority of players can be managed locally by a doctor with the necessary skillsets, for example GP, Sports Medicine Doctor or Team Doctor.
- A minority of players with prolonged symptoms (greater than 4 weeks for under-18s or greater than 10-14 days for adult players, players with recurrent injuries or experiencing educational difficulties) should be referred to an appropriate specialist or multidisciplinary clinic.
- All coaches should be made aware by players and/or parents if a player under their care has received a concussion in another sport/event.
- In children and adolescents, there is a risk of catastrophic injury from second impact syndrome if players are returned to play before they are recovered from concussion.

Signs and Symptoms

Contrary to popular belief, most (over 90%) concussions occur without a loss of consciousness and so it is important to recognise the other signs and symptoms. Concussion must be recognised as an evolving injury in the acute stage.

Some symptoms may develop immediately while other symptoms may appear gradually over time. Monitoring of players - minutes, hours and days - after the injury is therefore an important aspect of concussion management.

DIAGNOSIS OF ACUTE CONCUSSION SHOULD INVOLVE THE FOLLOWING:



1. Player's subjective report of her symptoms.
2. Observation of the player for physical signs of concussion.
3. Assessment of the player for cognitive change or decline.
4. Observation of players for behavioural change.
5. Players' report of any sleep disturbance.



Signs and Symptoms

INDICATORS	WHAT YOU WOULD EXPECT TO SEE
Symptoms	Headaches* Dizziness 'Feeling in a fog.' Fatigue Sensitivity to light or noise
Physical Signs	Loss of consciousness Vomiting Vacant Facial Expression Clutching Head Balance Disturbance (ataxia / unsteadiness) Motor In coordination Slurred speech
Cognitive Impairment	Loss short term memory Difficulty with concentration Decreased attention Diminished work performance
Behavioural Changes	Irritability Anger Mood Swings Feeling Nervous Anxious Sadness or Depression Withdrawal
Sleep Disturbance	Drowsiness Difficulty Falling Asleep

*Most common symptom

Return to Play (RTP)

A player with a suspected/ concussion should NEVER be allowed to return to play on the day of injury. In addition, return to play must follow a medically supervised stepwise approach and a player SHOULD NEVER return to play while symptomatic. A graded program of exertion prior to medical clearance and return to play (GRTP) is generally recommended.

GRTP for All Players

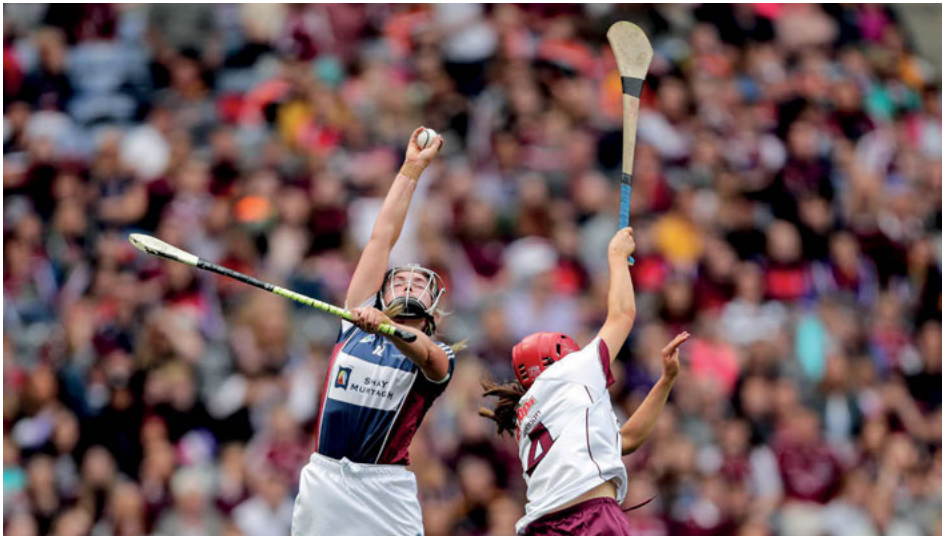
Rehabilitation Stage	Functional Exercise at Each Stage of Rehabilitation	Objective of Each Stage
1. No Activity for a minimum of 48 hours	Physical and Cognitive Rest	Recovery
2. Light Activity (at least 4 days)	Walking, swimming, cycling, keeping intensity <70% maximum permitted heart rate - (If Activity does worsen symptoms or bring on further symptoms return to previous stage. If no symptoms progress to next stage)	Increase HR
3. Sports Specific Exercise (at least 4 days)	Running drills - (If Activity does worsen symptoms or bring on further symptoms return to previous stage. If no symptoms progress to next stage)	Add Movement
4. No Contact Training Drills (at least 4 days)	Progress to more complex training drills- passing drills, progressive resistance training - (If Activity does worsen symptoms or bring on further symptoms return to previous stage. If no symptoms progress to next stage)	Exercise, coordination and cognitive load
5. Full Contact Practice (at least 1 day)	Following written medical clearance, participate in normal training activities. (If Activity does worsen symptoms or bring on further symptoms return to previous stage. If no symptoms progress to next stage)	Restore confidence and assess functional skills by coaching staff
6. Return to play (Minimum of at least 15 days since diagnosis)	Normal game play	Return to competitive action.

If any increase in/development of further symptoms occur while in the RTP program, then the player should drop back to the previous asymptomatic level and try to progress again after a further 24 hours period of rest has passed

Graduated return to education strategy

Concussion may affect the ability to learn at school (or college). Initially, the player may need to miss a few days of school, followed by a gradual return, avoiding activities that exacerbate symptoms.

MENTAL ACTIVITY	ACTIVITY AT EACH STEP	GOAL OF EACH STEP
Daily activities that do not give the athlete symptoms	Typical activities that the athlete does during the day as long as they do not increase symptoms (e.g. reading, texting, screen time). Start with 5-15 minutes at a time and gradually build up.	Gradual return to typical activities.
School activities	Homework, reading or other cognitive activities outside of the classroom.	Increase tolerance to cognitive work.
Return to school full-time	Gradual introduction of schoolwork. May need to start with a partial school day or with increased breaks during the day.	Increase academic activities.
Return to school full-time	Gradually progress school activities until a full day can be tolerated.	Return to full academic activities and catch up on missed work.



Helping Players Cope with a Concussion Injury

Players often feel tired and may experience difficulties at work or school when carrying out a task which requires concentration. Players may also encounter mood difficulties and feel depressed, anxious or irritable with family or team mates. The following actions can help players cope:

- Once symptoms initially resolve a light exercise programme (See GRTP) appears to speed up recovery.
- Support should be provided to players during this recovery period. Parents, Coaches and Team-mates should reassure the player to follow the recovery protocols and ask the player if he has any questions or concerns regarding the injury. The player should be included in social activities which do not put the player at risk of a further concussion.
- Alcohol should be avoided as it may delay recovery and put the player at increased risk for further injury.
- Minimise exposure to TV, PC, Laptops, Smartphone, Tablet, Video Games etc These items should be avoided two hours before sleep as they can cause sleep disturbance.
- Sleep disturbance is common and hence restoring normal sleep patterns and Circadian rhythms is essential. Napping is generally not recommended during recovery from concussion, as it can disrupt the circadian cycle of sleep and wakefulness.
- Attention to hydration and nutrition is important (dehydration exacerbates and prolongs headaches and other symptoms).
- When dealing with persistent symptoms, it is essential that players only take medications prescribed by their doctor.
- Recovery from concussion should not be rushed nor pressure applied to players to resume playing until recovery is complete. The risk of re injury is high and may lead to recurrent concussion injuries. – “It is better to have missed one game than the whole season.”
- Remember in children and adolescents, there is a risk of catastrophic injury from second impact if players are returned before they have recovered.



**REMEMBER
FULL
RECOVERY
IS POSSIBLE!**