

Concussions

Return-to-work guide For employers and administrators

Every person's recovery from concussion is different. The five progressive stages are meant to give the employer and medical provider general guidance to assisting with the patient's gradual return to work. These stages are not to be viewed as concrete for every person to progress through if their symptoms do not warrant it. What is important is to find a balance between providing the employee with the necessary supports for symptom relief while progressing to their normal work schedule. Employees with faster recoveries may skip a stage or two.

Stage	Activity level	Criteria to move to next phase
1 - Rest phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain low level cognitive and physical activities. No prolonged concentration Avoid activities that increase symptoms or put person at risk of hitting their head No physically demanding activities; no sports until cleared by physician Controlled cardiovascular activities ok (stationary biking, walking) as long as symptoms don't increase Avoid busy environments with crowds or moving objects in background Try daily living tasks, baking, drawing, art or play cards as tolerated Assess for symptom increase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can sustain concentration for 30 minutes before significant symptom exacerbation Symptoms reduced or disappear with cognitive rest breaks, allow return to activity
2 - Work from home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal expectations for productivity Avoid cognitive activities that worsen symptoms Perform a trial of working from home for several minutes with multiple rest breaks. Paper documents, safety manuals, noise distractions, controlled physical tasks. Start with timed sessions with breaks after each session gradually increasing times (example: 10 minutes with 5 minute break; repeat for 30-60 minutes) STOP if symptoms increase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 hours of cyclic work tasks without symptoms Symptom status improving overall 2 to 3 rest breaks built into work day
3 - Re-entry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend half-days (shortened work hours) with 2 to 3 (20 to 30 minutes) scheduled rest breaks Minimal to moderate expectations for productivity Rest breaks should be in a quiet location with dimmed lighting if possible Lunch break in a quiet environment Eliminate nonessential work and computer use No performance evaluations at this time Avoid tasks that worsen symptoms Slowly increase physical activity as tolerated. Avoid hitting head and STOP if symptoms increase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Symptoms improving Tolerates 4 to 5 hours of activities with rest cycles Only 1 to 2 rest breaks built into work day
4 - Full-time return	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gradually increase hours until full day is tolerable Moderate expectations for work Gradually increase tasks and computer use Prioritize assignments but allow extra time to complete tasks Design schedule for make-up work Gradually increase more physically demanding, louder and visually intense work settings Avoid overloading with work and placing undo pressure to complete projects/assignments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued symptom improvement Needs no more than 1 cognitive/physical rest break per day
5- Full-time/ Full duty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full performance expectations Full return to more demanding tasks Continue to make up workload Maximal expectations for productivity 	N/A

Return-to-work employer support strategies

General support recommendations

- Maintain sensitivity and understanding for people dealing with this “unseen” injury
- Reassure the person
- Open communication with the person and his/her medical team so proper restrictions and/or recommendations can be followed
- Allow for breaks of rest in a quiet area
- Write out short and specific instructions
- Allow person to use ear plugs to decrease noise sensitivity
- Allow person to use sunglasses to decrease light sensitivity
- Decrease brightness of computers, screens and overhead lighting
- Decrease computer use
- Balance workloads into small manageable tasks
- Provide visual aides
- Be given more time to complete assignments or tasks
- Avoid large group settings/meetings

Difficulty with attention and concentration

- Allow for breaks of rest in a quiet area
- Write out short and specific instructions
- Decreased lighting if possible and quiet room
- Lessen work load into small portions of a project/assignment
- Encourage communication with health care provider about any continuing symptoms

Difficulty with memory and comprehension

- Notes or recorded instructions
- Provide visual training aides
- Mnemonic devices, repetition and rehearsal
- Use fact sheets
- Allow extra time to complete tasks

Difficulties with noise or light

- Consider dimming lights in work room; allow hat or sunglasses
- Avoid noisy breakrooms and assemblies
- Decrease computer use

Difficulties with emotions or behaviors

- Avoid putting employee “on the spot” in front of peers
- Allow for rest breaks if employee gets overloaded
- Seeks help before emotions worsen
- Monitor co-worker relationships

If you have any questions, please call the Prevea Concussion Clinic at (920) 272-3300.

