

Concussion education

What Can I Do to Help Feel Better After a Concussion? (excerpted from the Center for Disease Control)

Although most people recover after a concussion, how quickly they improve depends on many factors. These factors include how severe their concussion was, their age, how healthy they were before the concussion, and how they take care of themselves after the injury.

- Get plenty of sleep at night, and rest during the day.
- Avoid activities, such as contact or recreational sports, that could lead to another concussion. (It is best to avoid roller coasters or other high-speed rides that can make your symptoms worse or even cause a concussion.)
- Take only those drugs that your health care professional has approved.
- Write down the things that may be harder than usual for you to remember.
- If you're easily distracted, try to do one thing at a time. For example, don't try to watch TV while fixing dinner.
- Do not neglect your basic needs, such as eating well and getting enough rest.
- Avoid sustained computer use, including computer/video games early in the recovery process.

If you already had a medical condition at the time of your concussion (such as medication overuse, depression, head and neck pain, migraine), sleep disturbance, obesity, it may take longer for you to recover from the concussion. Anxiety and depression may also make it harder to adjust to the symptoms of a concussion. While you are healing, you should be careful to avoid doing anything that could cause a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body.

Engage in 20-30 minutes of moderate intensity cardio, 4-5 times per week. Target heart rate should be between 116-150 (depending on age)

Cognitive Strategies

- Use of compensatory strategies can include:
- Taking frequent breaks
- Alternating between activities with high and low attentional demands
- Taking additional time to complete tasks to ensure accuracy
- Completing one task at a time to reduce multitasking
- If performing multiple tasks, writing out information to reduce working memory load
- Scheduling more complex tasks for the morning or another time of optimal alertness
- Using memory aids and strategies such as notes, reminders, calendars, and repetition
- Minimizing background distractions (e.g., extraneous conversations, music, text messaging, email pop-ups)

Sleep:

- Maintain a regular bedtime and awakening time schedule including weekends. Get up about the same time every day, regardless of what time you fell asleep.
- Establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine. Relaxing rituals prior to bedtime many include a warm bath or shower, aromatherapy, reading, or listening to soothing music.

- Sleep in a room that is dark, quiet, comfortable, and cool; sleep on comfortable mattress and pillows. Avoid loud noises and bright lights in the bedroom. Use of a fan or white noise machine may be helpful.
- Use your bedroom only for sleep. Have work materials, computers, and TVs in another room.
- Finish eating at least 2-3 hours prior to your regular bedtime. Try not to drink too much fluid close to bedtime to prevent needing to urinate during the night.
- Avoid caffeine within 6 hours; alcohol & smoking within 2 hours of bedtime. Avoid using alcohol as a sleep aid.
- Exercise regularly; finish a few hours before bedtime. There is good evidence that regular exercise improves restful sleep. This includes stretching and aerobic exercise
- Get regular exposure to outdoor or bright lights, especially in the morning.
- Avoid naps.
- Go to bed only when sleepy. Lay in bed only for sleeping, not for work or watching TV.
- Avoid things that can trigger worry or anxiety before bed, such as anxiety provoking, work-related, or other unpleasant tasks, or disturbing television programs. Reduce the anxiety of anticipation of the following day by making simple preparations such as a to-do list or laying out the next day's clothes and shoes. Keeping a written list of worries is beneficial for some people.
- Stimulus control — Stimulus control therapy is based on the idea that some people with insomnia have learned to associate the bedroom with staying awake rather than sleeping.
- You should spend no more than 20 minutes lying in bed trying to fall asleep.
- If you cannot fall asleep within 20 minutes, get up, go to another room and read or find another relaxing activity until you feel sleepy again. Activities such as eating, balancing your checkbook, doing housework, watching TV, or studying for a test, which "reward" you for staying awake, should be avoided.
- When you start to feel sleepy, you can return to bed. If you cannot fall asleep in another 20 minutes, repeat the process.
- Set an alarm clock and get up at the same time every day, including weekends.
- You may not sleep much on the first night. However, sleep is more likely on succeeding nights because naps are not allowed.

Relaxation

Relaxation therapy involves progressively relaxing your muscles from your head down to your feet. This exercise can promote restfulness and sleep and reduce insomnia. Beginning with the muscles in your face, squeeze (contract) your muscles gently for one to two seconds and then relax. Repeat several times. Use the same technique for other muscle groups, usually in the following sequence: jaw and neck, shoulders, upper arms, lower arms, fingers, chest, abdomen, buttocks, thighs, calves, and feet. Repeat this cycle for 45 minutes, if necessary.