

FACT SHEET

CONCUSSION RECOVERY

When it comes to concussion in rugby, proper healing time is non-negotiable. Every community player, regardless of age or skill level, must observe a minimum 21-day stand-down period before returning to match participation. The Graduated Return to Play (GRTP) Protocol outlines the **earliest possible** return timeline, but each player's recovery will vary based on symptom progression. This crucial recovery time helps safeguard long-term health and playing future.

During your minimum 21-day recovery period, you must follow two key steps:

1. Gradually return to learning or work (GRTL/W)
2. Gradually return to exercise and rugby (GRTP).

These steps reflect best practice for concussion recovery, based on international guidelines.

Before you can play rugby again, you need to be able to:

- Go to school or work without symptoms.
- Do your normal daily tasks without needing special changes.
- Exercise without having symptoms recur.

Only when you can handle your everyday life should you think about returning to rugby.

NZR'S GRADUATED RETURN TO LEARN/WORK:

Key considerations: If symptoms continue with mental activity, stop the activity until symptoms ease.

STEP	RECOMMENDED ACTIVITY	GOAL OF STEP
1. Relative rest	Activities of daily living and reduced screen time.	Gradual return to typical daily activities.
2. School/work activities	Homework, reading, or other cognitive activities outside the classroom/workplace.	Increase tolerance to cognitive work.
3. Return to school/work part-time	Gradual introduction of school/work. <i>May need to start with a partial school/workday or with increased breaks during the day. Limiting bright, noisy or crowded environments may also help manage symptoms.</i>	Increase cognitive activities.
4. Return to school/work full-time	Gradually progress school/work activities until a full day can be tolerated.	Return to full academic/work activities.

All players diagnosed with a concussion or suspected concussion must go through the GRTL/W process above. For more information talk to your coach, your local union, contact New Zealand Rugby or check out nzrugby.co.nz/concussion

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NZR'S GRADUATED RETURN TO PLAY

Key considerations:

- Progress only if symptoms are improving and symptom-free.
- Minimum 24 hrs between steps.
- If symptoms worsen, stop, rest, and return to the previous step after 24 hrs.
- Must be symptom free for 14 days before Step 4.
- Seek medical advice if symptoms persist.

STEP	RECOMMENDED ACTIVITY	GOAL OF STEP	MIN. TIME
1. Relative rest	Activities of daily living and reduced screen time.	Gradual reintroduction of school/work.	Days 1–2
2. Light to moderate exercise	Symptom-guided low to moderate intensity activity such as walking or jogging.	Increase heart rate and monitor tolerance to exercise.	Days 2–14
3. Individual sport-specific exercise	Individual training (e.g. running, change of direction, burpees) with no risk of head impact.	Add movement. Tolerate changes in direction and body orientation.	
4. Non-contact training drills	Include more challenging drills (e.g. multiplayer training, passing). Re-introduce weight training.	<i>Start this step only if you have had no symptoms for the past 14 days.</i> Resume usual intensity of exercise, coordination, and increased thinking.	Days 14–18
SEEK MEDICAL CLEARANCE			
5. Build to full contact training	Build into participation in normal training activities, including contact drills.	Restore confidence and assess recovery.	Days 18–20
6. Return to Play	If symptom free through Step 5, then eligible for match participation after a minimum of 24 hrs.	Full return to play with no restrictions.	Earliest Day 21

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