

Cognitive Rest: Letting Your Brain Rest After a Concussion

Your Brain

Your brain works hard every day: thinking, talking, learning, listening and making decisions. It even controls your physical movements. (It “tells” your legs to move to walk or your knees to bend to sit down.) Your brain is always busy!

When your brain is too busy, it can’t properly heal from injury. It needs to rest.

The best way to heal from a concussion is to let your brain rest (known as “cognitive rest”).

Cognitive Rest

Just as you rest your body to heal after a physical injury, you need to rest your brain to heal after a concussion. Cognitive rest prevents your brain from working too hard to allow it to heal.

Some concussions may need ongoing management if symptoms do not improve. Together, you and your primary care provider can create a plan of care to manage your symptoms. They may also refer you to a specialist if needed.

What Activities You Should Avoid

You can’t “turn off” your brain but you can avoid certain activities to help it to rest. Avoid doing the following activities to give your brain a break:

- texting
- looking at screens for more than 20 minutes at a time (computers, cell phones, TVs)
- playing video games

- writing
- going out with friends
- reading difficult books
- doing puzzles or solving word games
- listening to loud music
- doing other activities that require a lot of thinking and focus.

What Activities You Can Do

Cognitive rest does not mean you should sleep all of the time. It is important to find a balance between resting, doing light activities and sleeping.

Some activities can help you heal. Make sure to limit the amount of time you spend on each activity to **less than 20 minutes**.

Examples of activities you can do during cognitive rest include:

- listening to quiet, soothing music
- light reading or writing
- slow-pace walking in a low-traffic neighborhood
- playing an easy card or board game that does not require much focus
- resting in a quiet, dimly lit room.

If these or any other activities increase your symptoms, stop doing the activity and discuss it with your primary care provider. You can follow each activity with a short nap or rest if needed.

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What to do for a Child

Treatment for concussion is the same for a child as it is for an adult. It is important to help your child learn and practice cognitive rest.

Your child can continue to go to school but needs to be careful not to push too hard.

- Tell your child's teachers and principal that your child had a concussion. Be sure to tell them your child needs to be careful not to overdo it while at school. Taking breaks throughout the day, having extra time to do assignments or postponing assignments may help.
- Talk to your child about the importance of avoiding screens (computer, TV, video games, cell phone) during the school day and outside of school.
- Ask teachers to excuse your child from assignments involving screens. Give your child ideas for free time activities they can do that don't involve screens.

It is important for you to talk with your child's school about their special needs and restrictions.

If your child's symptoms are not improving while attending school, they may need to stay home for a period of time to get the rest needed to recover.

Whom To Call With Questions

Call your primary care provider if you have questions about cognitive rest or if your symptoms return.

Other Resources

- Allina Health:
allinahealth.org/concussion
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Traumatic Brain Injury:
cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury