

## Alcohol and recreational drugs after a concussion

### *Friendly disclaimer*

We know that for many teenagers, alcohol and other substances are not legal at your age. From a medical point of view, though, it's important to talk openly and honestly about them, because some young people will use them anyway.

- We'd rather you have the facts to stay safe than avoid the conversation.
- If you're underage, the safest option is not to drink or use substances.
- But if you do, these guidelines help you understand how it may affect your recovery.

### Why this matters

After a concussion, your brain is healing. Alcohol and recreational drugs affect the brain's chemistry, balance, reaction time, and mood. Using them too soon can:

- Make your symptoms worse.
- Slow down your recovery.
- Increase your risk of another injury.

For teenagers, this matters even more – your brain is still developing.

### Alcohol

**First 48 hours:** Avoid completely – your brain needs rest.

**After that:** If you are **symptom-free with everyday life** (school, walking, chatting, light exercise), an occasional **small amount of alcohol** is unlikely to cause harm.

**If symptoms return after drinking** (headache, dizziness, fogginess), that's your brain's signal to hold off longer.

Things to remember:

- Alcohol reduces reaction speed → you're more vulnerable if you knock your head again.
- It can mask symptoms - you might feel "fine" but actually be setting yourself back.
- Best approach: reintroduce slowly, with friends you trust, and avoid binge drinking until you're fully back in sport and school.

### Cannabis and recreational drugs

- Drugs like cannabis, cocaine, MDMA, ketamine and others **interfere with brain recovery**.
- They affect memory, concentration, and mood – exactly the areas your brain is healing.
- They can **worsen anxiety or low mood**, which are already common after concussion.
- Some increase risk of falls, poor judgment, and accidents.
- Best avoided until you're fully recovered.

### Smoking & Vaping

- Nicotine reduces blood flow to the brain and body.
- Both smoking and vaping can **slow healing** and worsen headaches.
- Cutting down (or ideally stopping) will only help your recovery.

### Key Points

**First 48 hrs = no alcohol.**

**Symptom-free?** A small amount of alcohol may be okay – just reintroduce slowly.

**Drugs and nicotine:** best avoided until fully recovered.

Always let your **symptoms guide you**.

