

Optimising sleep after a concussion

This advice sheet is designed to help you understand the importance of sleep after a concussion and how to improve your sleep quality during recovery. A concussion can sometimes disrupt your sleep patterns and getting good rest is important for healing your brain and body. Here, we explain why sleep matters, how it can be affected by a concussion, how it helps in recovery, and provide tips to improve your sleep.

The main thing to remember is that you will recover and to listen to your body. Any changes in your sleep that you notice are very likely to be temporary while you recover. If you want further advice please don't hesitate to ask your Return2Play Clinician.

Why sleep is important

Sleep is essential for everyone's health and well-being. It helps our brains work properly, allowing us to physically recover, think clearly, remember things, and regulate our emotions. For people recovering from a concussion, sleep is even more important. Good sleep helps repair the brain, reduce symptoms, and improve overall recovery.

How Concussions affect sleep

After a concussion, sometimes people notice changes to their sleep, such as:

- **Trouble falling asleep:** You might find it hard to fall asleep or get back to sleep during the night.
- **Waking up:** You may find you wake up more easily than previously
- **Needing to sleep a lot:** You might feel very tired and need more sleep than usual.
- **Different sleep patterns:** It may be more difficult to keep to a regular sleep schedule.

These changes can be due to symptoms like a headache or from the concussion's direct effect on how your brain regulates sleep.

How Sleep helps with concussion recovery

Getting enough good-quality sleep is important for concussion recovery. Here's how sleep supports healing:

- **Helps brain function:** Sleep allows your brain to rest and recover, which is crucial for thinking clearly and remembering things.
- **Reduces symptoms:** Proper sleep can help reduce common concussion symptoms such as headaches, mood changes, and cognitive difficulties.
- **Supports physical healing:** During sleep, the body repairs itself, including the brain cells affected by the concussion.
- **Stabilises mood:** Good sleep helps manage emotions and reduces the likelihood of mood issues after a concussion.



Tips for better sleep – ‘Sleep Hygiene’

To improve your sleep while recovering from a concussion, follow these simple tips:

1. **Keep a regular sleep schedule:** Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, even on weekends. This consistency helps regulate your body’s internal clock.
2. **Create a calming bedtime routine:** Make the hour before bed nice and relaxing as well as the same most nights. This trains your body to know it is time for sleep.
3. **Reduce screen time before bed:** Avoid looking at screens (phones, tablets, computers, TV) for at least an hour before sleep. The light from screens can interfere with your body’s sleep signals.
4. **Check your bedroom:** Ensure your sleeping environment is dark, quiet, and cool. Use blackout curtains, earplugs, or a white noise machine if needed.
5. **Avoid stimulants and alcohol:** Reduce your intake of caffeine and nicotine, especially later in the day, as these can keep you awake. Avoid alcohol, which can also disrupt sleep.
6. **Stay active, but not too close to bedtime:** Light exercise during the day can help you sleep better at night, but avoid intense activity within an hour of bedtime.
7. **Limit naps:** If you feel the need to nap, keep it short (20-30 minutes) and avoid napping late in the day, as this can interfere with nighttime sleep.
8. **Listen to your body:** While a routine is helpful, it’s also important to rest when you need it. If you’re particularly tired, allow yourself some extra sleep.

Following these tips can help improve your sleep. Do remember that healing takes time, and it’s important to find what works best for you.

If you have any concerns or need further support, please discuss them with your Return2Play Clinician.

(This advice sheet provides general guidance on improving sleep after a concussion. Always seek personalised advice from a healthcare professional.)

