

Most mild traumatic brain injuries (mTBI) and concussions resolve quickly, and people fully recover. For some, symptoms may last a little longer. Research has shown using strategies to stay active from the beginning of the process promotes optimal recovery.

This handout includes information on what the current science says about active recovery, why it works, and helpful tips to use during the process of getting better following mTBI and concussion.

What is active recovery following concussion or mild Traumatic Brain Injury (mTBI)?

- Active recovery means staying engaged in daily activities and letting how you feel drive how much you do, and how much you don't do.
- People's brains and bodies need to rest for a short period after injury (just a few days) and then activity can gradually increase. It is critical to avoid activities which could result in another injury, but light activity is recommended.
- During active recovery, your goal should be to slowly increase the length of time and intensity of activities, as comfortable to you.
- Be sure to stick with activities you've been "cleared" for by your healthcare provider.

Why does active recovery work?

- Research shows that people recover faster when they remain active and stay engaged with their social connections.
- After concussion or mTBI, it is common to be more sensitive to different sights, sounds, movements, and environments. Your brain may need practice processing this incoming information to reduce its sensitivity, which can lead to overall symptom reduction.
- While it may be helpful to temporarily avoid or reduce activities or time in environments that increase symptoms, avoiding things altogether or stopping things that are only very minimally bothersome may increase sensitivities, worsen symptoms, and prolong recovery times.
- Active recovery works because it allows you to find a comfortable level of activity to make it easier to manage common symptoms of concussion and mTBI.
- The level of activity is gradually increased so you can get back to all of the things that are important to you faster and in a healthy way.
- You can learn about additional tools to manage increased sensitivity to sights, sounds, movements, and environments in the **Sensory Sensitivity** handout found here:
<https://www.myshepherdconnection.org/mild-tbi-concussion/mind-and-body/body>

If you have concerns or experience more severe symptoms, talk to your doctor, athletic trainer, or other healthcare providers for guidance on safely managing activity after mTBI or concussion.



What can I do to manage my symptoms and support an active recovery?

You can use the **4 P's Strategy** to find ways to modify participation in things like social activities, sporting events, school, work and to help you return to all the things you enjoy.

As you increase participation, monitor how you are doing. Consider what is working well, and what you might try to do differently.

PLAN by thinking about what you need to do in advance

- If you know an activity may bother you, it may help to plan out breaks ahead of time or generally limit the amount of time you spend doing that activity.
- Using scheduling tools like a phone app or day planner can help you feel less overwhelmed and in better control of your recovery. Writing your plan down and setting reminders can help you stay organized and reduce the load on your brain.

PRIORITIZE what is important and by how you feel

- Consider scheduling important things to do when you have the most energy and feel the best.
- Important activities may be tasks with deadlines, tasks someone else is counting on you to finish, or tasks that have higher importance (like going to your doctor's appointment).

POSITION yourself and your environment for success

- Environments that are noisy, bright, or busy can require more brain effort and energy. This can increase your symptoms.
- Small changes, like asking to sit in a quieter area of a restaurant, can have a big impact on how you feel

PACE yourself during activities that take more energy and focus

- Plan to take regular breaks during activities and when symptoms increase.
- Doing relaxing activities like going for a short walk, stretching, taking deep relaxing breaths, meditating, listening to soft music, or spending time with a pet are active ways to rest for short periods between activities that may increase common symptoms.

Additional Comments:

