

RETURN TO PLAY GUIDE

Hockey Eastern Ontario has created the following information as part of their Return to Play policy. While these six steps are commonly associated with returning from a concussion, these steps should be applied to any significant injuries. A Significant Injury is any injury that a player sustains that requires the player to be absent from hockey for a period of greater than one week. Examples are, but not limited to, concussions, broken bones, severe sprains or strains, major lacerations, respiratory incidents, etc.

After a significant injury has occurred the Team Safety Person/Trainer with the injured player, parents/guardians and medical professionals will determine the best course of action. The Team Safety Person/Trainer needs to be kept apprised of any changes in the player's condition and the player should be considered unfit to play until assessed by the appropriate medical professional. No player should return to play until the appropriate medical professional has given the player clearance to do so in writing and the Return to Play criteria has been met.

Return to Play Process

The return to play process is gradual, or as mandated by medical protocols and begins after a doctor has given the player clearance to return to activity. If in the rehabilitation phase for return to play the player experiences any pain or symptoms, the player must be re-evaluated by a physician. Remember, symptoms may return later that day or the next, and not necessarily when exercising.

Step 1: No activity, only complete rest, as determined by the appropriate medical protocols. Proceed to step 2 as advised by health professionals.

Step 2: Light aerobic exercise, such as walking or stationary cycling. Monitor for symptoms and signs. No resistance training or weight lifting.

Step 3: Sport specific activities and training (e.g. skating).

Step 4: Drills without body contact. May add light resistance training and progress to heavier weights. The time needed to progress from non-contact to contact exercise will vary with the severity of the injury and the player.

Only go to step 5 after medical clearance. (Reassessment and note)

Step 5: Begin drills with body contact.

Step 6: Game play. (The earliest a concussed athlete should return to play is one week).

Key Considerations

Players returning from injury should wear all protective equipment and wear a different color jersey to identify themselves until fully recovered.

Players should proceed through return to play steps only when they do not experience any pain or symptoms and the physician has given clearance. Each step should be a minimum of one day. Significant injuries happen and are as unique as individual players.

Never return to play if symptoms persist.

After an extended layoff the player should practice before they play. The practice situation is a controlled setting which allows the player to gradually adapt, feel comfortable, and regain confidence without risking further injury. It also permits the player to regain conditioning and cardiovascular endurance before returning to game play. **A player is more at risk to injure/re-injure themselves because of a lack of conditioning.**

A player should not return to play unless they can demonstrate the appropriate skills in a practice situation. **The goal is full function and return to pre-injury fitness and skill level.**