

Managing Mental Health Symptoms

Concussion recovery takes a toll on the body, both physically and emotionally. In recent years, psychological well-being has been recognized as a critical component of injury recovery, playing a major role in overall health outcomes. Increasingly, research points to the importance of recognizing and managing mental health issues, in order to cope productively with the stressors of daily life. Concussions can result in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral symptoms, such as mood swings, anxiety, memory issues, and depression. Existing mental health issues may also be exacerbated by a concussion.

It is important to note that every concussion is unique; this list is by no means exhaustive, and these are suggestions, not universal solutions. Expect to try several techniques *before identifying which ones work best* for you. This information is best used *in combination with the guidance* of a licensed health care professional; please seek additional support if you are struggling.

The following outlines possible strategies for managing mental health challenges during recovery.

A) Physical Activity, as Tolerated

Light aerobic exercise—such as walking or biking—is recommended throughout recovery. Athletes should work closely with coaches and team physicians to create an appropriate Return to Activity plan.

B) Deep Breathing Exercises

Deep breathing can help to reduce acute stress, anxiousness, or dizziness. Exercises can be done standing, seated, or lying down; the key is to be as comfortable as possible. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, at a gentle and regular rhythm. There are many available [apps](#) and [online resources](#) designed to guide deep breathing exercises.

C) Identifying and Reducing Sources of Stress

Learn to recognize physical, emotional, and behavioral stress responses to identify their source. Below are examples of common responses you may have experienced or observed:

- Muscle aches
- Increased heart rate
- Low energy
- Chest or jaw tightness
- Dry throat and/or mouth
- Restlessness, agitation
- Feelings of worthlessness and/or anger
- Lack of motivation and/or concentration

- Skin picking, nail biting, teeth clenching, foot tapping
- Seeking reassurance
- Increased substance use, spending
- Change in appetite or sleep pattern

The brain requires energy to repair itself after injury. It may be helpful to create a schedule in order to prioritize the tasks and activities that are most important to you; know that you might not have the time or energy to handle the demanding work, academic, athletic, and social calendar you may have be used to while you are recovering. Break essential tasks down into manageable work blocks aim for distraction-free 25-minute sessions followed by 5-minute breaks. Social media use be a significant source of stress for many individuals; notice how media consumption makes you feel and consider setting limits for apps or websites that may be negatively impacting your mental health.

D) Meditation

Mindful meditation is recommended to aid relaxation and relieve stress. There are now a number of free videos on [YouTube](#), apps, like [UCLA's Mindful APP](#) and [audiobooks](#) designed to guide you in your practice. Before you begin, choose a quiet space without risk of interruption and get into a comfortable position, focus your attention on the present moment and the rhythm of your breath. Similar to learning a new skill or sport, meditation may not immediately feel natural to you. Start slow—try incorporating a 10-minute session into your day.

E) Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

PMR involves intentionally tensing and relaxing muscle groups to relieve the tension that can be caused by anxiety and stress. Free resources include [YouTube](#) videos, [Healthlink BC's PMR](#), and [Anxiety Canada's](#) resources are available to guide this practice. Lay comfortably on your back, eyes closed, with your arms at your sides, and focus on the rhythm of your breath. Tense each muscle group independently from feet to head.

F) Memory Aids

You may find it difficult to concentrate on and remember details when recovering from a concussion. To ease the stress associated with memory loss, forgotten appointments, or missed deadlines, it can be helpful to set yourself reminders and alarms, or to create a visual calendar to keep track of your schedule. For example, consider downloading a calendar app or putting up a hard-copy wall calendar at home; using sticky notes or labels as visual reminders; or using a maps app to get yourself safely from place to place.

Be patient—your brain is working to heal! It is normal to experience mental health challenges during the recovery process. Reach out to your support system if you are struggling, or if your symptoms worsen.

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