Western Connecticut State University
Post-Concussion Return to Learn
Program

Introduction

Return-to-learn is in many ways similar to the Stepwise Program, Return-To-Play. Recommendations are based on the fact that both physical and cognitive activities require brain energy. After a sport related concussion, brain energy may not be available for physical and cognitive activity because it is in energy crisis mode.

Because it is difficult to prescribe specific guidelines for Return-To-Learn, general recommendations will be outlined. These recommendations will take many factors into account including the fact that a student-athlete may appear physically normal but still be unable to perform in a cognitive setting due to concussive symptomatology.

The Team

Return-to-Learn will be managed by a multi-disciplinary team that includes physicians, athletic trainers, psychologist/counselors, neuropsychologist, administrators, coaches, the academic concussion liaison (ACL) and on-campus support services. The extent of each professional’s involvement will be dependent on the needs of the student-athlete.

In particular, the ACL will act as the academic accommodation point person. This person will work with the student-athlete to determine reasonable accommodations and support services. The role of this position will require an understanding of the student-athletes academic situation, the medical management plan and on-campus services that could aid in a more seamless recovery.

Members of the team by name include:

Mark Allen – Head Athletic Trainer, WCSU. 203-837-9016
Patrick Hull – Assistant Athletic Trainer, WCSU. 203-837-9032
Pete Algarin – Assistant Athletic Trainer, WCSU. 203-837-9063
Lindsey Davis – U.A. Athletic Trainer, WCSU. 973-800-9979
Dr. Neil Culligan – Associated Neurologist, Danbury.
Elisabeth Morel – Director, AccessAbility Services. WCSU 203-837-8225
Academic Concussion Liaison
Lori Mazza – Athletic Director, WCSU. 203-837-9014
Dr. Keith Betts – Vice President Student Affairs, WCSU. 203-837-8600
Isabel Carvalho – Academic Advisement Center. WCSU 203-837-8397
Dr. Sue Cizek – Medical Director Health Services, WCSU. 203-837-8594
Nancy Haensch – APRN, Health Services, WCSU. 203-837-8594
Return-To-Learn Protocol

1. Attending or referred athletic trainer will contact the ACL, Athletic Director, Head Coach and Health Services in the event of a concussion.

2. The injured student athlete will follow-up with the ACL and the attending athletic trainer to determine the extent of accommodations and medical intervention. Please note: All accommodation requests need to be made by the student to AccessAbility Services located in Higgins Annex 017.

3. All medical decisions regarding “Return-To-Learn” shall reside with the physician or the physician designee.

Stepwise (Return-To-Learn)

1. Cognitive rest the same day as the sports concussion. Avoid reading, classroom activity, T.V., texting, computer activity along with any other activities that exacerbate concussive symptoms. The period of time needed to avoid class or homework is individualized. If the student athlete cannot tolerate light cognitive activities stay at home or in the dorm.

2. The gradual return to activities should be based on the absence of concussion symptoms following cognitive exposure. Once the student athlete can tolerate cognitive activity (i.e. reading, TV, computer) he/she can return to the classroom, often in gradual increments. Continuous communication within a scheduled format will be set-up between the student-athlete and pre-determined members of the support team.

3. Modifying factors and co-morbidities such as headache disorders, learning disabilities and mood disorders will be considered when Return-To-Learn recommendations are planned.

4. At any point, if the student-athlete becomes symptomatic (i.e., more symptomatic than baseline), the team physician should be notified and the student-athlete’s cognitive activity reassessed.

Successful Program Implementation

The extent of academic support needed should be decided upon by Western’s multidisciplinary team. The level of this team’s involvement will vary on a case-by-case basis and the flow of information between the student athlete and engaged team members is vital.

The majority of student-athletes who are concussed will not need a detailed Return-To-Learn program. Minor modifications are often all that is needed in the first two weeks. Full recovery typically occurs anytime within the first two weeks.

In cases where the symptoms persist beyond two weeks, the student-athlete may require a change in his/her class schedule, or even consider a medical leave of absence. Students are also encouraged to request additional accommodations through AccessAbility Services at any time during the recovery process.

A more difficult scenario occurs when the student-athlete experiences prolonged cognitive difficulties. Regular medical intervention along with the support of the University is extremely important in guiding the student-athlete. This student-athlete will be exposed to any and all support services available on campus including special services and AccessAbility Services.