

CAN I GO BACK IN YET?

Return to play (RTP) decisions following an injury can be challenging. Pain is not always the best indicator of when an injury is healed. Often injuries start to feel better before they are completely healed, stable and ready for activity. During this time, the injured part is still vulnerable and subject to incomplete healing and/or re-injury. These RTP decisions should be made with input from the physician or athletic trainer, the parent, coach and the athlete.

For optimal healing, follow these **criteria for return**. If they can't be completed due to the injury, you are not ready to go back in yet!

What are the criteria for RTP?

- **PAIN** – Pain is gone as well as any swelling or bruising
- **RANGE OF MOTION (ROM)** – The injured body part should be able to move in all directions without pain. The motion should be back to normal limits, baseline or similar to that of the other side.
- **STRENGTH** – Strength helps provide protection to the injured area. All body parts should be functioning normally to withstand the stress of activity. To test strength, resist the motion of the injured joint in a variety of positions and make sure it is pain free and equal on both sides.
- **WEIGHT BEARING PROGRESSION** – A weight bearing progression would start with the following the steps below in succession. If any of these cause pain, or increase the signs or symptoms of the injury, do not progress. Each step has to be pain free and well tolerated.
 - Standing->Walking->Jogging->Jumping->Running->Sprinting
- **FUNCTIONAL MOVEMENTS AND SPORTS SPECIFIC SKILLS** - Just because the muscles surrounding an injured area appear strong does not necessarily mean they are ready to handle the demands of sport. Young athletes should be able to complete all activities that mimic the demands of their sport, without any symptoms, before returning to practice and games. These include:
 - Cutting maneuvers at varying speeds
 - Agility in all directions
 - Offensive – athlete chooses path or pattern
 - Defensive – athlete reacts to the movement of someone or something
 - Power exercises – explosive movements (potentially with weighted objects)
 - Sport specific drills – Passing, dribbling, shooting, skating, hitting, etc.



- **RESTORE ENDURANCE** – Deconditioning is a fear and reality for almost all injured athletes. Cardiovascular (CV) endurance can be diminished in as little as 3-5 days of inactivity. Gradually increasing the intensity and duration of skills and drills can restore CV and muscle endurance. This will help provide the stamina needed for the young athlete to return the full demands of their sport safely.

For mild injuries, all of the above criteria may be met quickly (i.e., during the course of the same practice/game). If able to complete these steps, they may consider returning directly to the practice/game. If unable to complete, the injury should be evaluated and a treatment plan identified that addresses the above criteria.

What if there is continued pain or difficulty?

Reassess your activity level. If full pain free recovery is the top rung on a ladder, you can't get there skipping steps. You will inevitably fall back down and have to start over. Therefore, any pain during these steps in the RTP will slow down the healing process and lengthen recovery time. The concept of No Pain, No Gain does not apply to the injury treatment process. If/when pain returns, stop and rest before advancing to the next level - You are not ready to go back in yet! If return is still delayed, seek medical attention to make sure there is no underlying cause that is slowing this RTP process.

For more information visit:

American Academy of Pediatrics www.AAP.org

American Medical Society for Sports Medicine www.AMSSM.org

National Federation of High Schools www.nfhs.org/articles/return-to-participation-considerations-following-sports-injury/

Consult your primary care physician for more serious injuries that do not respond to basic first aid. As an added resource, the staff at **Children's Sports Medicine** is available to diagnose and treat sports-related injuries for youth and adolescent athletes. To make an appointment, call **402-955-PLAY (7529)**.

