



How a Concussion Feels

Suppose you contracted a virus that made you feel “headachy, tired, irritable, and spacey”. Suppose you were told that every day you would feel a little bit better and every week you would feel a little bit better... But you would not feel 100% back to your old self for up to 4 weeks? Suppose you were told you may feel well enough soon to be back at work... but you will have to “pace” yourself. If you don’t pace yourself and you if push yourself too hard by doing too much work, you will cause your symptoms to “flare” and prolong your recovery time. How would you feel? What would you do?

The scenario above is exactly what a concussion feels like to our students. The injured cells in a concussion can cause up to 4 weeks of symptoms – headaches, fatigue, fogginess, grouchiness/sadness, difficulty concentrating, remembering, learning new material and thinking. The symptoms are more pronounced in the beginning of a concussion. As the cells heal themselves over 1 to 2 to 3 to 4 weeks, the student with a concussion is less afflicted by headaches, feels less mentally foggy, and feels less tired. Energy returns. Learning and activity resume a little bit more each day, a little bit more each week.

If you were faced with that situation, would you stay home for 4 weeks? Could you afford to financially? You know your doctor is not likely to write you a note excusing you from work for 4 weeks (with pay). Additionally, as you start to feel better each day, you likely welcome resuming some cognitive activity, even if it’s for short periods of time. Likely, you will return to work (after perhaps 2 to 4 days of bed rest). What helpful ideas would you like to hear from your boss and coworkers (?)

Here are some ideas that might help you maximize productivity at work and yet, will still allow for your brain to heal.

- o Let you come in late and/or leave early, especially during the first or second week?
- o Let you take quiet *rest breaks* for even 5 to 10 minutes per hour in your office?
- o Let you attend and listen in meetings but not expect you to jump in and take on extra tasks?
- o Let you participate in group activities so demands do not fall solely on you?
- o Provide you with extra time for a few deadlines?
- o Can co-workers take some *busywork* off your plate?

The trick here is to be *present* at work but not allow work to *set back* your recovery. How can you contribute without being 100% “on”? How can you pace your work and home demands so that you do not find yourself feeling worse each day instead of better? How can you balance your work and your healing in a way that your concussion resolves in 4 weeks (hopefully) instead of 4 months?

During your recovery, a doctor will not likely tell your boss to allow you to do only X at work but not Y for 4 weeks. You, your boss and co-workers will need to figure out a way you can contribute at work WHILE continuing to support your recovery. That way, when you do recover in the typical timeframe of 4 weeks, you will have remained up to date with your work and you will have continued to collect a paycheck.

Can you apply these same concepts to your students with a concussion? That is what we call “differentiated instruction” in schools.

Students with a concussion do not need a medical prescription telling teachers what they can and cannot do in the classroom. Students with a concussion need understanding teachers (bosses) and peers (co-workers) who temporarily cut back cognitive demands WHILE still focusing on recovery and learning.

Consider these academic adjustments for your student during the first 4 weeks, known as the acute recovery phase. Can the student:

- o Listen and learn?
- o Demonstrate mastery of the material in alternative fashion? Discussion? Participation?
- o Show mastery of the material with fewer problems? With less written output?
- o Audit the material – base grade on attendance, discussion, participation without testing or large written project?
- o Take eye/brain breaks for 5 to 10 minutes per hour in the classroom?
- o Take scheduled 15 to 20 minute rest breaks in the school clinic 1X mid-morning and/or 1X mid-afternoon?
- o Focus on quality of learning instead of quantity of in-class work or homework?
- o Participate in more group work?

**Can YOU be the boss
YOU would want to have
in this situation?**

