

## **For Faculty: How to Assist Students with Concussions**

### **What is a concussion?**

A concussion is considered a type of traumatic brain injury. Though often associated with playing sports, concussions may also be caused by car accidents, having fallen and hit your head, or having received blows to the head in some way. This type of motion may push the brain up against the walls of the skull, resulting in a number of physical and cognitive symptoms. For injuries where a concussion is suspected, being examined and diagnosed by a health care provider is advised. While most people make a full recovery from a concussion, it can take time to return to normal functioning.

Symptoms may not be immediate and can appear in the following days or weeks after the incident that caused the injury. Headaches, neck pain, (temporary) loss of consciousness, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, appearing dazed, and fatigue are all common symptoms. Delayed symptoms may include irritability, mood changes, sensitivity to light and sound, difficulty sleeping, changes to taste and smell, and difficulty with memory and concentration.

### **How can a concussion impact a student's academic ability?**

It is generally recognized that concussions affect a student's ability to participate, concentrate, learn, and perform well in the classroom and in their coursework. Further, tasks that require significant concentration can impact a student's ability to recover or may even make their symptoms worse. As such, successful recovery from concussions requires rest, particularly within the first 24 hours. This includes limiting physical exertion and tasks that require concentration, such as reading, school work, using the computer, playing video games, or watching television. To inform an individual student's healing process, Columbia Health has created a Return to Learn protocol that emphasizes a step-wise recovery and the re-integration of physical and cognitive activities until symptoms are no longer experienced and regular activities may be resumed.

Recovery time following a concussion varies based on a few factors, including the severity of the concussion, what part of the brain was affected by the injury, the person's age, and their health status prior to the concussion. A health care provider can advise when it is safe to resume activities, both cognitive and physical, as symptoms improve over time, generally within about 10 days.

### **How can I support a student with a concussion as they recover and return to learn?**

There is no one way to support a student recovering from a concussion. What one student needs as they heal may not be the same as another. To support the student as their brain heals and manage their academic load, some short-term changes may be helpful.

Accommodations may be recommended to help facilitate a student's recovery from concussion. For accommodations to be determined, a student must submit medical documentation to Columbia Health's Disability Services (DS).

## **What can I expect with accommodation requests for students with concussions?**

DS serves as a resource for faculty members to facilitate meeting the needs of students with a concussion while keeping in mind the requirements of your course. Disability Services determines a student's eligibility for accommodations and either DS or the student will inform faculty of the student's approved accommodations. For undergraduate students, DS will coordinate the accommodations and for graduate students, the liaison of the school or program will work directly with faculty to coordinate the accommodations. Examples of accommodations may include (but are not limited to) extensions on due dates for assignments, additional time allotted to complete exams (if able to take the exam), note-taking services, or other assistance as determined on a case-by-case basis.

### **Online & Off-Campus Resources**

Heads Up!, Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) : [cdc.gov/headsup/](https://cdc.gov/headsup/)

### **On-Campus Resources**

Medical Services: 212-854-7426  
[health.columbia.edu/medical-services](https://health.columbia.edu/medical-services)

Disability Services: 212-854-5555  
[health.columbia.edu/disability](https://health.columbia.edu/disability)

*GH: Last Reviewed/Updated [April 2021]*