

# Good news for athletes who are slow to recover from concussion

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A new study suggests that athletes who recover more slowly from concussion may be able to return to play with an additional month of recovery beyond the typical recovery time, according to a new study

published in the January 18, 2023, online issue of *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology. Slow recovery was defined as taking more than 14 days for symptoms to resolve or taking more than 24 days to return to play, both of which are considered the typical recovery times for about 80% of athletes with concussion.

"Although an [athlete](#) may experience a slow or delayed [recovery](#), there is reason to believe recovery is achievable with additional time and injury management," said study author Thomas W. McAllister, MD, of the Indiana University School of Medicine in Indianapolis. "This is an encouraging message that may help to relieve some of the discouragement that [athletes](#) can feel when trying to return to their sport. While some athletes took longer than 24 days to return to play, we found that three-quarters of them were able to return to sports if given just one more month to recover."

The study looked at 1,751 college athletes who had been diagnosed with a concussion by a team physician. Of the athletes, 63% were male and 37% were female. Male athletes participated primarily in football, soccer and basketball. Female athletes participated primarily in soccer, volleyball and basketball.

Participants were evaluated five times: within six hours after their injury, one to two days later, once free of symptoms, once cleared to return to play, and at six months.

Participants reported symptoms daily to [medical staff](#), up to 14 days following injury and then weekly if they had not yet returned to play.

A total of 399 athletes, or 23%, had a slow recovery.

Researchers found that of the athletes who took longer than 24 days to return to play, more than three-fourths, or 78%, were able to return to

play within 60 days of injury, and four-fifths, or 83%, were able to return to play within 90 days of injury. Only 11% had not returned to play six months after injury.

For the slow recovery group, the average time for returning to play was 35 days after [injury](#), compared to 13 days in the overall group.

"The results of this study provide helpful information for athletes and medical teams to consider in evaluating expectations and making [difficult decisions](#) about medical disqualification and the value of continuing in their sport," McAllister said.

A limitation of the study is that participants were all collegiate varsity athletes and may not be representative of other age groups or levels of sport, and the results may not apply to other types of mild brain injuries.

**More information:** Thomas Walker McAllister et al, Characteristics and Outcomes of Athletes With Slow Recovery From Sport-Related Concussion: A CARE Consortium Study, *Neurology* (2023). DOI: 10.1212/WNL.0000000000206853 , [dx.doi.org/10.1212/WNL.0000000000206853](https://doi.org/10.1212/WNL.0000000000206853)

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