



## Concussion in the Athlete

Idaho is a safer place for contact sports athletes. March 29th, 2010, before the Idaho Legislature adjourned for this session, they passed Idaho's concussion bill, H676. Our state leaders learned what only a few parents or even coaches know- Mistreated and untreated concussions are hindering the brain power of our student-athletes. Idaho's concussion bill, working through the State Board of Education, provides information for our coaches, parents and athletes on the signs and symptoms of concussion.

What is a concussion? How do they happen? How do we know if our athletes have received a concussion? These are all important questions that parents, coaches, and teachers need to ask. In the past, a concussion would have been downgraded to a "ding" and the athlete told to shake it off and get back in the game. With increased knowledge of these injuries, concussions should no longer be downgraded, but taken seriously. This kind of injury affects one of the most important parts of our body, our brain.

If you suspect that your athlete has sustained a concussion, have he/she evaluated by a health care professional trained in dealing with concussions and let them guide your athlete to a safe return to play. There are many variables to consider, including how they were hit and if they have a history of previous concussions. You may notice behaviors that are "red flags" such as memory loss, difficulty with focusing on tasks (school assignments), sensitivity to light and/or noise, and suddenly becoming emotional for unknown reasons. Keep in mind not all headaches are an absolute symptom of a concussion and an athlete doesn't need to lose consciousness to have a concussion.

To promote healing in your athlete's brain they need rest, both physically and mentally. They should rest until the signs and symptoms are gone. Only then can you begin increasing activity. Mental rest is just as important as physical rest. Everyday activities such as watching TV, playing video games and texting can prolong the healing of a concussed brain. School work may need to be modified for proper healing. I have known concussions to last anywhere from a few days to 6 months and longer.

It's important for parents and coaches to understand why following return to play guidelines is so crucial after an athlete receives a concussion. The most current research indicates children's brains take longer to heal than adults. Early return to play can have an impact on life long learning ability as well as making the athlete more vulnerable to another concussion.

Neurocognitive testing (testing how the brain is working), as well as functional testing (testing how the brain reacts to activity) are part of determining safe return to play. Neurocognitive testing measures reaction time, attention span, as well as memory. ImPACT is a program that focuses on neurocognitive testing and a pre-season test (baseline) can help with return to play decisions. Functional testing includes a ladder approach in which the athlete is symptom free before beginning. It is best to begin either on a treadmill or stationary bike where it is easy to monitor signs and symptoms. If symptoms return, return to rest. With the guidance of an Athletic Trainer or MD a proper timetable can be implemented and the athlete can start symptom free sport specific tasks, then progress further, and eventually returning to contact.

Let's keep our youth athletes playing and receiving the positive benefits from sports such as fun, teamwork and determination. Let's also keep them safe by treating concussions as the serious injury they are, and only getting our kids back onto that playing surface when they are healthy and ready to go. If you would like to learn more about concussions, go to [stlukeselksrehab.org](http://stlukeselksrehab.org) and watch a few short videos on this topic.