

Module C: Respond

This module presents information on:

- how to respond to a potential concussion causing event.

The CATT Concussion Pathway is a visual representation of the appropriate response and management of a suspected concussion.

When a potential concussion has been recognized, the next step is to respond appropriately. Every situation will be different, but an appropriate response always begins with:

- Basic first-aid to assess for serious injury and the need for immediate emergency medical care;
- Removing the person from current activity; and
- Assessing for immediate signs and symptoms of concussion.

Serious injuries, such as a spinal injury or a fractured skull, should be ruled out before continuing. Follow the basic principles of first-aid, assessing for:

- Danger – Are you or the injured person in immediate danger?
- Response – Does the person respond to you?
- Airway – Is the person's airway open?
- Breathing – Is the person breathing?
- and Circulation – Does the person have a pulse?

This should be followed by an assessment for Red Flags. If the situation is determined to be a medical emergency, call for an ambulance and stay with the person until emergency services arrive. Do not move the person unless trained to do so.

Once an emergency situation has been ruled out, the person should be removed from their current activity, and assessed for the signs and symptoms of concussion. The effects of a head injury do not always follow a predictable pattern, so someone with a suspected concussion should not be left alone, and should not be allowed to leave on their own.

An emergency contact should be informed as soon as possible, to arrange for transportation and monitoring over several hours for deterioration or red flag symptoms.

If the event occurs at work, follow the workplace incident protocol as appropriate. This may include documenting the event, seeking medical assessment, communicating with the workplace, and following up with workers compensation. The emergency contact or someone else might need to follow-up with the workplace to request more information, recognizing that a person with a concussion will experience difficulty navigating these steps.

The CATT Concussion Incident Report for Adults is a tool that can be used to document the details of a suspected concussion event. It can be provided to the emergency contact, and should be brought to any medical appointments.

If signs and symptoms are not present, the person with a suspected concussion can resume normal daily activities, limiting strenuous physical and mental activity. Continue to monitor for delayed signs and symptoms of concussion for up to 48 hours. This includes looking for visual clues and listening to what the person says.

If no signs or symptoms are present at the end of the 48-hour period, a concussion is no longer suspected.

If signs and symptoms of concussion appear during this period, the person should stop their current activity and seek medical care from a doctor or nurse practitioner. Most concussions can be managed without a visit to the emergency department, however early assessment by a licensed medical professional has been associated with better recovery. This assessment can rule out more serious forms of injury or other medical conditions, and confirm a concussion diagnosis based upon patient history, physical examination, and additional tests, as needed. If access to a family doctor or nurse practitioner is not available, seek care at a walk-in clinic or emergency department.

The CATT resource, Questions to ask your Doctor, may help guide and record the discussion about concussion management and recovery. Although there is a movement to standardize concussion recognition and management, not all medical professionals are aware of the current best practices and guidelines.

You might want to seek a second opinion if the doctor is:

- Unable to comprehensively assess for concussion, including balance and cognition;
- Dismissive of your symptoms or;
- If the advice contradicts current concussion management strategies, such as advising total rest beyond 48 hours.

A medical assessment letter should be requested to document whether a concussion has been diagnosed or not. This may be particularly important if the concussion did not occur at work, and may help facilitate the return to work process. A standardized medical assessment letter for concussion is available in the Resources section.

A concussion assessment should include:

- A medical assessment, including the identification of any signs and symptoms of concussion;
- Education about the need for physical and cognitive rest; and
- A conversation about developing a return to work or a return to activity plan.

Continue to the quiz to test your knowledge on responding to a potential concussion causing event.