

Guidance for Returning to Woodwind & Brass Instruments After Concussion

Recovering from a concussion doesn't just affect sport - it can also impact musical practice. Playing a woodwind or brass instrument requires breath control, posture, focus, and endurance. These can all be sensitive in the early stages after injury.

Key principles

- Symptom-guided: only play when you feel well at rest. If you develop headache, dizziness, or fatigue, stop and rest.
- Gradual reintroduction: start with short, easy practice sessions and build up over time.
- One step at a time: increase either the length of practice or the difficulty of the music, not both at once.
- Rest days matter: give yourself breaks between sessions if needed.

Practical advice

- Start small: Begin with short, gentle practice (5–10 minutes) at a comfortable volume and range.
- Breath control: Use relaxed airflow. Brass players especially should avoid forceful playing until fully symptom-free.
- Embouchure and posture: Begin seated, with good support, before returning to standing or marching positions.
- Cognitive load: Start with familiar exercises or scales. Introduce sight-reading or complex repertoire later.
- Endurance: Increase session length gradually. Wait until you can tolerate at least 30 minutes comfortably before attempting long rehearsals.
- Ensemble return: Delay full rehearsals or performances until you can manage your usual solo practice without symptoms.
- These changes can be due to symptoms like a headache or from the concussion's direct effect on how your brain regulates sleep.

When to Seek Advice

- If symptoms worsen or return each time you play.
- If you feel increasing pressure in the head, dizziness, or "fogginess" during practice that does not settle within an hour afterwards
- If progress stalls for more than a week.

Summary

Think of your return to music the same way you would return to sport - a gentle build-up, guided by symptoms, with attention to breath pressure, posture, and concentration.

