

IN THE SPIRIT OF RECONCILIATION THE AFL ACKNOWLEDGES THE TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS OF COUNTRY THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA AND THEIR CONNECTIONS TO LAND, SEA AND COMMUNITY. WE PAY OUR RESPECT TO THEIR ELDERS PAST AND PRESENT AND EXTEND THAT RESPECT TO ALL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES TODAY.

Smarter, Safer Footy: concussion and injury updates for 2026

- Concussion management + headgear
- PlayHQ concussion functionality
- Prep-to-Play
  - Reduce injuries by up to 50%
  - Improve tackling, landing and contact techniques
- Questions

Concussion Guidelines 2026

- A revised version of the *Management of Sport Related Concussion in Australian Football Guidelines* will be available for the 2026 season
- They provide a practical translation of the scientific evidence on sports related concussion
- There are no major changes other than those we will speak about in the next few minutes



Why Is Concussion Important

- Concussion is an injury to the brain resulting from direct or indirect trauma
- It causes a wide range of symptoms (what the player reports) and signs (what other people notice)
- Generally, symptoms and signs come on quickly, but there can be delayed onset of symptoms
- The recovery and return to function usually takes around 3 weeks but it can be longer, especially in younger people
- There is no single test to diagnose concussion; it can present in very different ways

Common Signs and Symptoms of Concussion

- DIzziness
- Headache
- Nausea
- Blurred vision
- Sensitive to noise or light
- Feeling nervous or irritable
- Feeling in a fog
- Fatigue or drowsiness
- Balance disturbance
- Memory problems
- Not quite right

Management of Concussion (or suspected concussion)

Day of Injury:

- Recognise
  - If you don't witness the incident ask other people – trainers, coaches, parents, spectators
- Remove
  - Remove the player from the match/training and assess them (ideally) in a quiet space
- Refer
  - Refer the player for a prompt medical assessment to confirm the diagnosis and provide a treatment plan

If there is any doubt, err on the side of caution

Safe Return To Play Following Concussion

Players must complete the return to play protocol which comprises:

- Brief period of **relative rest** (24-48 hours)
  - Stay home, avoid screens where possible, take it easy
- **Recovery stage** (generally at least 7 days, often more)
  - Player can do physical activity, even with mild symptoms, away from team training
  - Prioritise return to school/work
- **Graded loading program (at least 14 days)**
  - Player must be 100% symptom free, at rest and with exertion
  - Physical and cognitive load increases through this stage
- **Return to play**, **once medical clearance has been provided**

The earliest that a player may to return to play is on the 21st day following concussion (when the day of concussion is designated day 0)

What About Helmets?

The AFL has published *Australian Football Headgear Standards* designed to support development and manufacture of headgear suitable for Australian Football

- Headgear that meets the new Standards has demonstrated potential to reduce head impacts in laboratory testing
- The next step is to assess performance in real world settings (e.g. matches), with research focusing on both player acceptability and effectiveness in reducing the magnitude and severity of head trauma and concussion risk
- Players who choose to wear headgear are encouraged to wear headgear that meets the Standards



AFL PLAY | PlayHQ Concussion Functionality



KEY FEATURES

- Player Ineligibility & Clearance
- Automated Notifications
- Return-to-Play Declarations
- Reporting Dashboard
- Privacy



LEARN MORE AT PLAY.AFL/CONCUSSION/PLAYHQ

PLAY.AFL/HEALTH-SAFETY



CARE FOR OUR COMMUNITY

AFL is Australia's Game. We are passionate about ensuring everyone in our game plays safe, happy and healthy. On this page, you will find essential health and safety information for players and parents. Head to ClubHelp for further information for club officials and sports trainers.

PLAY SAFE - GENERAL HEALTH

Our commitment to our players, coaches, umpires and volunteers is to create the safest possible environment for people to train and play. The priority is, and always will be, the short and long-term welfare of every player who participates in our great game at any level.











PLAY.AFL/CONCUSSION



NEED HELP RIGHT NOW?

Think you've seen or experienced a possible concussion? Follow these steps.

- START BY CHECKING FOR RED FLAGS ⊕
- NO RED FLAGS? CHECK FOR OTHER SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS ⊕
- IF THERE ARE ANY SIGNS OR SYMPTOMS, TAKE THE PLAYER OFF THE GROUND ⊕

MATCH DAY CONCUSSION GUIDE →



SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Dizziness
Headache
Blurred vision
Confusion
Emotional ups & downs



