



VICTORIAN AMATEUR FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

AFL COMMUNITY CONCUSSION GUIDELINES

Purpose

The VAF A is committed to the health and safety of all participants who play/participate in Australian Rules football. The AFL Doctors association has produced guidelines for community football. These guidelines will continue to evolve as new evidence is made available to ensure best practice.

The Issue

The game of Australian Football is a contact sport that involves high flying marks, extraordinary skills, and exhilarating tackles. The rules of Australian Football have always had a focus on protecting the safety of players, with the most important body part being a player's head. The 'high contact' rule aims to minimise the frequency in which players receive contact to their head that may lead to brain injuries.

Concussion is a brain injury that occurs from impact to a player's head, either through collision with another player (which includes whiplash from body contact) or with the ground. Whilst the skull is in place to protect the brain, in a high impact collision, the brain can move back and forward within the skull causing temporary dysfunction.

Concussion is not always an immediate injury, and sometimes the symptoms may not present themselves until hours after the initial impact. Some concussion symptoms may include:

- Difficulty staying awake.
- Headaches or migraines
- Forgetfulness or memory problems

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- Vomiting
- General unwell feeling or feeling a bit 'off'.
- Dizziness
- Confusion, slurred speech, or unusual behaviour
- Blurred or double vision

The appropriate management of concussion is essential in ensuring the brain has enough time to heal and recover. Therefore, anyone who experiences concussion type symptoms are encouraged to seek medical advice from their Doctor on how best to manage the injury. If any deterioration is observed, transport to an accident or emergency department should occur as soon as possible.

It is crucial that anyone with a diagnosed concussion does not immediately return to play.

As a temporary brain dysfunction, concussion will resolve with time. This may vary from an hour or so to several days. Occasionally the brain will recover even more slowly. The best treatment is rest from physical activity and work/study. The player should be seen by a doctor who will monitor the symptoms, signs and brain functioning.

The doctor must clear the player to return to sporting activity and this will usually involve a stepped approach with a gradual increase in activities over a few days. The doctor may arrange a specialist opinion (if the concussion is slow to resolve) or cognitive testing (brain functioning). If at any stage the symptoms or signs are getting worse seek urgent medical attention.

The Guidelines (refer also to [AFL Community Concussion Guidelines](#))

The guidelines are for trainers, first-aid providers, coaches, umpires, club officials and parents and should be understood and followed by all parties for the benefit and welfare of the players.

Head impacts can be associated with serious and potentially fatal brain injuries. In the early stages of injury, it is often not clear whether you are dealing with a concussion or there is a more severe underlying structural head injury. For this reason, the most important steps in initial management include:

1. Recognising a suspected concussion.
2. Removing the player from the game; and
3. Referring the player to a medical doctor for assessment.

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Any player who has suffered a concussion or is suspected of having a concussion must be medically assessed as soon as possible after the injury and **must NOT** be allowed to return to play in the same game/practice session. There should be an accredited first aider at every game and the basic rules of first aid should be used when dealing with any player who is unconscious or injured.

It is recommended that all trainers have the [Head Check Concussion Management App](#) downloaded on their phone

Return to Training and Playing Guidelines for players following a Concussion:

1. Player must have a minimum 12-day mandatory break from playing matches.
2. Player must obtain a written medical clearance from a Medical Practitioner (i.e. General Practitioner, Sports Doctor, Neurologist) to return to training and playing. The medical clearance must state that the player has been cleared from a concussion injury.
3. Player must only recommence 'usual contact' training when symptom free and physically able to complete full training sessions.
4. Recommend that any player with symptoms persisting for more than 5 days (post the concussion) seek specialist opinion prior to resuming training and playing matches.

Additional Resources:

[Head Check Concussion Management](#)

[AFL Concussion Management Guidelines](#)

[Concussion Management](#)

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