shiftCM concussion management

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CONCUSSION REHABILITATION

FAIRWAY Physiotherapy

At Fairway Physiotherapy, we value an evidence-informed approach to concussion care, and have recently partnered with the **Shift Concussion Management Program,** one of the best educators and rehabilitation providers for concussion healthcare in the field. This means that our practitioners have undergone intensive training to deliver rehabilitation strategies that are based on industry best-practices.

Experts agree that this injury requires an interdisciplinary approach to treatment - particularly for those individuals suffering from persistent symptoms. That is why you may find that our team recommends multiple treatment approaches and service providers both within and outside of the clinic. Each individual experiences concussion in a different way, which is why our rehabilitation recommendations may vary from patient to patient.

Our Rehabilitation Methods:

The types of rehabilitation methods employed at our clinic depend largely on the characteristics and presentation of each individual patient. The following is a description of some of the common recommendations and/or interventions that can be valuable for concussion treatment and recovery.

Treatment & Rehabilitation for the Neck:

Many concussions occur simultaneously with neck injury, and the cervical spine is a well-documented driver of headaches, dizziness, and many other symptoms that overlap with concussion. It can be very challenging to determine the source of symptoms when there is both neck and head involvement. What's more, it's been shown that 30% of patients with co-existing neck involvement may not even complain of neck pain or stiffness. Rehabilitation for the neck may include a variety of manual therapy techniques to reduce muscle tension and guarding, improve joint mobility and range of motion, and reduce pain. You may also complete specific exercises in the clinic and at home to help improve strength and overall function.

Vestibular-Ocular Rehabilitation Therapy:

Dizziness is one of the most common complaints post-concussion, and a hallmark symptom (but not the *only* symptom) of vestibular or ocular (visual) dysfunction. These systems work in an interconnected fashion to give us a moment-to-moment sense of our position in space and an accurate perception of our surroundings. When these systems are not working optimally, it can be difficult to tolerate motion (ourselves or objects around us), busy spaces (like the grocery store) and can also make it difficult to carry out visual tasks such as reading and writing. It has been shown that those who exhibit difficulty with these systems after a concussion may take longer to recover - which is why early intervention is important. Vestibular-ocular rehabilitation involves a variety of exercises that may incorporate motion, balance, and/or visual tracking to "re-train" the brain so that it can function more effectively.

These exercises may provoke some dizziness, but it is important to expose yourself to these sensations in order to overcome the "miscommunication" your brain is experiencing.

For those with a lot of challenges with visual tasks, it may be recommended that you see an Optometrist who specializes in head injury before carrying out the rehabilitation described above. It's important to note that even though your *clarity* of vision might be unaffected by the injury, the overall *effectiveness* and *efficiency* of your visual system may still be suffering. An Optometrist may also recommend a specific form of Optometric Vision Therapy in some cases.

Exercise/Activity-Based Rehabilitation:

Contrary to past guideline recommendations, new research suggests that complete physical rest post-concussion may actually slow recovery and produce further difficulties with rehabilitation down the road. A "strict rest" approach may lead to cardiovascular de-conditioning, and when coupled with injury to the nervous system this can lead to more pronounced intolerance of activities requiring physical and/or cognitive exertion. We all know that for many health conditions (such as diabetes, high blood pressure) exercise provides a host of health benefits, and it appears the same may be true for concussion.

Light aerobic exercise initiated even in the acute (early) stage of concussion recovery may be beneficial. That said, it should be applied at an appropriate level of intensity (not too strenuous), and involve activity that is suitable to your preferences and fitness level. In some cases, exercise may be applied in the clinic under supervised conditions, and other times a program may be prescribed for you to carry out at home.

Assistance for Cognitive Difficulties, Returning to Work/School or Daily Activities:

Our Healthcare Providers can work with your Family Physician or Medical Provider and offer advice and recommendations around schedule regulation, daily life activities, work obligations, school and sport participation where needed. Note: ONLY a Medical Physician can provide clearance to return an athlete to full sport participation.

Cognitive difficulties (such as challenges with memory, attention, and concentration) are common following a concussion and often resolve over time with treatment techniques such as those listed above. When cognitive challenges become significantly limiting, you may benefit from more specific assessment and supportive strategies from an Occupational Therapist (OT) or Speech and Language Pathologist. OT's can help you pace and plan, conserve energy, compensate or remediate cognitive impairment, set healthy routines, learn ways to manage stress, sleep difficulties, anxiety, and depressed mood.

Mental Health Supports

As with any unexpected life event, sustaining a concussion can be incredibly challenging psychologically. Anxiety and depression are common following a concussion and need to be treated effectively to promote a full return to function.

There are a variety of mental health supports available to concussion sufferers. In some cases, speaking with a Psychotherapist, Psychologist, or Counselor can help you learn more about your condition, your moods, feelings, thoughts, and behaviours, and teach you how to take control of your life and respond to challenging situations with healthy coping skills.

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