

## Tips for Students: Managing Your School Work After a Concussion

First, you need to give yourself time to get better. While your brain is healing, you are much more likely to get a second concussion if you are doing things that you are not supposed to do. Second concussions can cause even worse damage to your brain. You can return to school and school work as advised by your doctor and increase your work load as long as your symptoms don't recur or get worse.

### To improve focus and organization

- **Consistently write down your homework assignments** (in an assignment book or personal organizer) as soon as they are posted. Color coding your textbooks, notebooks, and folders for each subject will help you to stay more organized. As soon as you receive a handout, you can immediately place it in the appropriate folder.
- **“Chunking” of homework assignments is recommended.** It will be helpful to take short breaks between assignments. You should plan for long-term assignments by breaking the assignment down into steps and setting deadlines for completion of each step.
- **When given directions, repeat them to yourself.** This strategy helps maintain the verbal information in short-term memory until the instructions can be completed.
- **Complete one task and then put materials away before starting the next task.**
- **Previewing/pre-reading material** (especially for courses with a large lecture component) before class to help you listen and comprehend material presented in class. Prior to any reading assignments, you would benefit from reading the questions at the end of the chapter first to aid in your comprehension.
- **Note-taking strategies:** You may have difficulty listening and copying down notes at the same time. It may be helpful to have a copy of the classroom notes. Discuss this with your teacher.

### To improve memory and academic performance

- **Repeat:** Just absorbing information is not enough. You have to hang onto it. To reduce memory seepage, try this: rehearse the material (repeat at least five times) immediately.
- **A picture is worth a thousand words:** Try to picture what you see, hear, or read. You could use flow charts, outlines, flashcards, etc. or make a “movie in your head” by visualizing a concept or an event. Add color and movement to the pictures in your head.
- **Learning occurs in spurts:** Try not to take in too much at one time. You should utilize “spaced practice” (i.e. working for 20-30 minutes on a subject and then moving on to different subjects) to enhance your long-term retrieval. You will learn more in several shorter study sessions than one long one.
- **Variety:** You should do something different each time the material is studied. Reading notes over and over is a less efficient and effective means of learning information. A better approach would be to transcribe notes on a word processor, reorganize, outline the notes, and then color code the material.

- **Use memory aids:** You should employ memory aids in order to recall information, including mnemonics and acronyms. Examples of mnemonics include: My Very Excellent Mother Just Served Us Nine Pizzas (for the order of the planets) and Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally (for the order of operations).
- **Review material before bedtime:** Your brain actually processes and stores information in long-term memory more efficiently while you sleep because it has less interference from the outside world.
- **Go it alone at first:** You should consider studying alone at first and becoming familiar with the material. Once you feel more confident of the material and have reviewed the material thoroughly, you could study with one or more of your classmates. During that study session, you and your classmates could trade off asking one another questions about the material. This would allow you to expose any gaps in your knowledge base.
- **Practice tests** can be an excellent way to study for tests. You could develop a practice test on your own or you could split the work up with other students in a study group.
- **Jog memory:** If you're struggling to recall needed information, try to "jog" your memory. If you've lost something, think back to when you last had it — what did you do next? And after that? Mentally, walk yourself through each of the activities that followed — this may enable you to recall what happened to the missing item.
- **Get organized:** Have fixed locations for all important papers, phone numbers, keys, glasses, wallets, etc. Think carefully about logical placement of such items or this won't work very well.