

Graduated Return to Activity & Sport

**GRAS**



**PROGRAMME**

**Community Rugby**

September 2023

# PRINCIPLES

● This HEADCASE version of the **Graduated Return to Activity & Sport (GRAS) programme** is aligned with the **UK Concussion Guidelines for (Non-Elite) Grassroots Sport** (published by the UK government April 2023) and has been adapted to provide community rugby specific context and examples.

## The GRAS Programme

- Applies to all players involved in community rugby and sport, irrespective of age.
- Follows a return to activity, learn then play pathway. The priority is to return to normal life, school/work before rugby.

There is a minimum return time of **21 days** (with the date of injury being day 0), provided there is a symptom free period of **14 days**. This means players will miss a minimum of two weeks with the potential to play on the third weekend (but only if they have been symptom free for the preceding 14 days).



## How does this differ from the old guidelines?

**1.** Importantly this pathway, recognising the value of light physical activity in a player's recovery, no longer requires an initial complete **14-day** stand-down period.

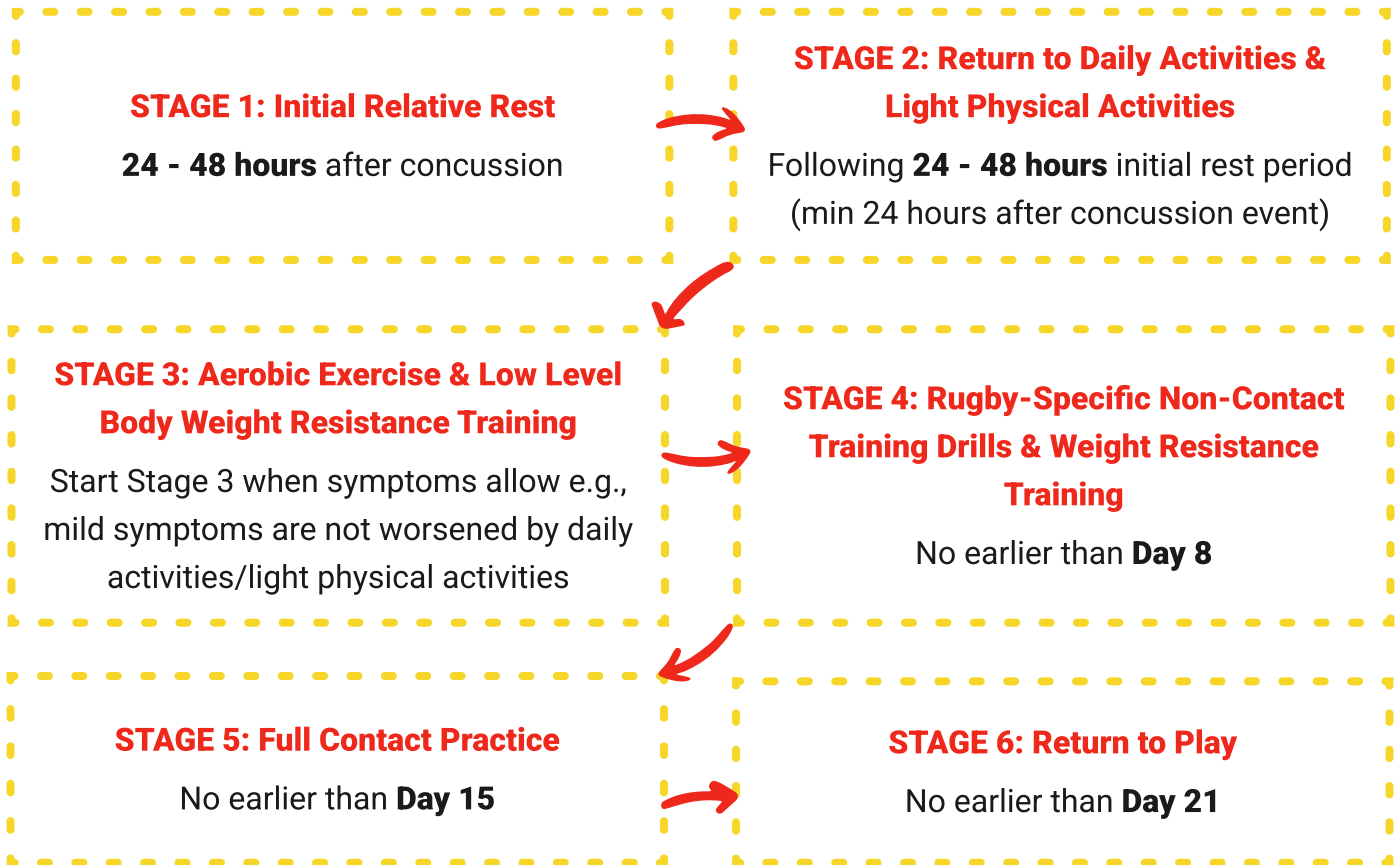
A player can start very light physical activity **24 - 48 hours** after their concussion provided that their symptoms are not more than mildly exacerbated. After a first week of progressive light exercise, provided symptoms are not more than mildly exacerbated by the activity, the player is able to start non-contact training activities in the second week with resistance training activities also started in this week.

**2.** Contact training activities with a predictable risk of head injury can then be introduced in week 3 (but only if/when the athlete has been symptom free for 14 days).

Detailed information is provided in the **HEADCASE Extended Guidelines**.

Overview of:

# Graduated Return to Activity & Sport (GRAS) programme



See Section 17 of the [UK Concussion Guidelines for Non-Elite](#) (Grassroots) Sport and its Graduated Return to Activity (Education & Word) & Sport Summary.



# GRAS STAGES



**ALWAYS  
REMEMBER!**

DAY 0 = when suspected  
concussion happened

# STAGE 1 Initial Relative Rest

## Timeline

24 - 48 hours after concussion

### Daily Living & Return to Activity

- Take it easy for the first **24-48 hours** after a suspected concussion.
- You may do some easy daily activities (e.g., walking or reading) provided that your concussion symptoms are no more than mildly increased.
- Phone or computer screen time should be kept to the absolute minimum to help recovery.
- It is best to minimise any activity to **10 to 15-minute** slots.
- Consider time off or adaptation of study/work (liaise with school or work if needed).

### Return to Sport / Rugby

- You may do some gentle activity (walking and easy daily activities) provided that your concussion symptoms are no more than mildly increased.
- Rest until the following day if these activities more than mildly increases symptoms.
- No rugby-specific or organised sporting activity during the initial rest period.

### Comments / Practical Considerations

Initial rest should be a minimum of **24 - 48 hours**

# STAGE 2 Return to Daily Activities & Light Physical Activities

## Timeline

Following **24-48 hours** initial rest period (**min 24 hours** after concussion event).

### Daily Living & Return to Activity

- Increase daily activities.
- Increase mental activities e.g., easy reading, limited television, phone, and computer use.
- Gradually introduce school and work activities at home.
- Rest if these activities more than mildly increase symptoms.
- Advancing the volume of mental activities can occur as long as they do not increase symptoms more than mildly.

### Return to Sport / Rugby

- Gradually introduce very light physical activity e.g., 10-15 minutes of walking.

### Comments / Practical Considerations

- There may be some mild symptoms with activity, which is OK.
- If any symptoms become more than mildly worsened by any mental or physical activity in Stage 2, rest until they subside.



## STAGE 3 Aerobic Exercise & Low level Body Weight Resistance Training

### Timeline

**Start Stage 3** when symptoms allow e.g., mild symptoms are not worsened by daily activities/light physical activities.

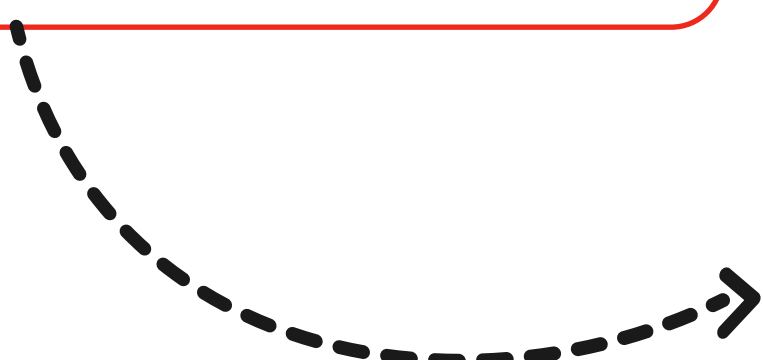
### Daily Living & Return to Activity

- Once short periods of normal level of daily activities can be tolerated then look to increase the time e.g., **20-30 minutes** then brief rest.
- Discuss with school or employer about return; consider initially returning part-time, including additional time for rest or breaks, or doing limited hours each day from home.

### Return to Sport / Rugby

- Introduce physical activity e.g. **10-15 minutes** of jogging, swimming, and stationary cycling at low intensity (able to easily speak during exercise).
- Gradually introduce low level intensity body weight resistance training e.g., Pilates/yoga
- Use exercises from the [Activate programme](#) to reintroduce functional conditioning and movement control exercises.
- The duration and the intensity of the exercise can gradually be increased according to tolerance
- No high intensity exercise or added weight resistance training.

### Comments / Practical Considerations

- If symptoms more than mildly increase, or new symptoms appear, stop, and rest briefly until they subside.
  - Resume at a reduced level of exercise intensity until able to tolerate it without more than mild symptoms occurring.
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## STAGE 4 Rugby-Specific Non-Contact Training Drills & Weight Resistance Training

### Timeline

No earlier than **Day 8**

### Daily Living & Return to Activity

- Continue to review return to school/work and/or reduced activities in the workplace (e.g., half-days, breaks, avoiding hard physical work, avoiding complicated study).

### Return to Sport / Rugby

- You may start non-contact training activities in your chosen sport once you are not experiencing symptoms at rest from your recent concussion.
- Progress the duration and intensity of aerobic exercise training e.g., increase in **15 minute** increments.
- Use the [Activate programme](#) to develop functional conditioning and movement control.
- Return to normal resistance training (if applicable).
- Introduce non-contact static rugby specific skills e.g., kicking passing drills.
- Only non-contact rugby training activities with **NO** predictable risk of head injury.
- Look to progress non-contact training in terms of intensity and duration, and to more complex training drills (still non-contact) that combine aerobic. and non-contact rugby specific skills e.g., running whilst passing/kicking.
- Work on skills to get ready for contact (such as positioning).

### Comments / Practical Considerations

- If symptoms more than mildly increase, or new symptoms appear, stop, and rest briefly until they subside.
- Resume at a reduced level of exercise intensity until able to tolerate it without more than mild symptoms occurring.

**A player should ONLY move on to Stage 5 (return to contact training) when they have NOT experienced symptoms at rest from their recent concussion for 14 days.**



# STAGE 5 Full Contact Practice

## Timeline

No earlier than **Day 15**

### Daily Living & Return to Activity

- Daily activities, school/work have returned to normal.

### Return to Sport / Rugby

- Return to normal rugby training activities including contact.
- Use the [Activate programme](#) to develop functional conditioning and movement control.
- Exposure to activities involving head impacts or where there may be a risk of head injury should be gradual, which could include:
  - Walk-throughs of various tackle types.
  - Practice of tackles using shields & tackle bags.
  - Slow increase in difficulty with moving players.
  - Slow introduction of decision making drills, ensuring good technique throughout.

### Comments / Practical Considerations

- Recurrence of concussion symptoms following head impact in training should trigger removal of the player from the activity.
- Should continue to be symptom free.
- Any occurrence of symptoms will require moving back to a previous stage where level of activity/ exercise does not more than mildly worsen symptoms.

# STAGE 6 Return to Play

## Timeline

No earlier than **Day 21**

### Daily Living & Return to Activity

- Return to normal level of daily activities.

### Return to Sport / Rugby

- Return to normal game play.
- Continue to use the [Activate programme](#) to reduce the potential risk of concussion.

### Comments / Practical Considerations

Symptom free at rest for **preceding 14 days** AND continued to be symptom free during pre-competition training (stages 4-5).





# IMPORTANT GRAS CONSIDERATIONS

- 1.** Progressing too quickly through **Stages 3 - 5** whilst symptoms are significantly worsened by exercise may slow recovery.
- 2.** Although headaches are the most common symptom following concussion and may persist for several months, exercise should be limited to that which does not more than mildly exacerbate them.
- 3.** Symptom exacerbation (worsening) with physical activity and exercise is generally safe, brief and is self-limiting typically lasting from several minutes to a few hours.
- 4.** Resolution of symptoms is only one factor influencing the time before a safe return to competition with a predictable risk of head injury.
- 5.** Approximately two-thirds of individuals will be able to return to full sport by **28 days**.
- 6.** Disabled people will need specific tailored advice which is outside the remit of this guidance.
- 7.** Medical advice from the NHS via 111 should be sought if symptoms deteriorate or do not improve by 14 days after the injury.
- 8.** Those with symptoms after **28 days** should seek medical advice via their GP.