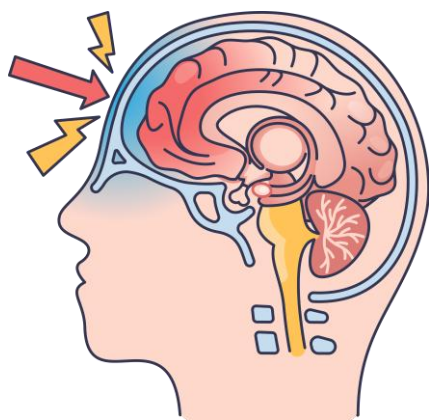


DANCER HEALTH TIPS FROM UAB SPORTS & EXERCISE MEDICINE

Concussion in Dancers

Dale Colorado, DO, MPH



A **concussion** is a mild traumatic brain injury caused by a direct blow to the head, neck, or body that results in a force being transmitted to the brain. Concussions can occur in daily activities as well as during sports or dance. In dancers, concussions can occur due to a fall, contact/collision with props or other dancers, or “whiplash-type” injuries. It is important to note that 1) concussions can occur *without* direct head impact, 2) most concussions will *not* cause someone to lose consciousness, and 3) symptoms from a concussion may *not* be present right away.

Concussions can cause a wide variety of symptoms including headache, dizziness or lightheadedness, nausea or vomiting, balance problems, fatigue, confusion, sensitivity to light or noise, or difficulty concentrating or remembering. While most concussions resolve within 1-2 weeks, some can be more serious and prolonged.

It is important for dancers (and the whole dance team including coaches and parents) to be aware of the signs and symptoms of concussion and know what to do in the event of a suspected concussion. Delaying treatment has been shown to lead to longer recovery times and increased symptom occurrence. Dancers should stop dancing immediately if they experience any of the symptoms listed above following a blow to the head, neck, or body, and should be evaluated by an appropriate health care provider with experience evaluating concussions.

Every concussion is different, and each dancer is unique. Return to dance following concussion should be tailored to the individual dancer. While there is limited literature/research related to concussion in dance or return to dance following concussion, we can utilize the framework from the Concussion in Sport Group expert recommendations. In general, dancers will progress through six stages in a stepwise fashion to return to dance following concussion:

Stage 1: Relative rest and symptom-limited activity (typically 1-2 days).

Stage 2: Activity integration and light aerobic exercise. Activity integration includes activities of daily living and returning to school or work activities. Light aerobic exercise includes walking or stationary bike.

Stage 3: Moderate aerobic exercise and limited individual dance-specific exercises.

Dancers may progress to jogging and some resistance training. Dance activities should focus on warm-ups and avoid jumps and partnering. Turns should be avoided at first, but then gradually incorporated.

Stage 4: Full class in normal setting. Dancers may return to all turns/jumps, floorwork, partnering/contact, and dancing with classmates/company members.

Stage 5: Full rehearsal. This stage incorporates performance features.

Stage 6: Return to performance.

It is important to highlight that each dancer will progress at different rates and each stage should take at least one day. Dancers should work closely with their medical team throughout the return to dance protocol.

Given the high level of physical activity required of dancers, concussions can occur. Education about concussion, understanding the signs and symptoms, knowing when to involve a healthcare provider, and following a return to dance protocol can help ensure safe and effective concussion management and return to dance activities.

Is there a dancer health related topic you want to learn more about? Or maybe you have a specific question? Send those to us via email (rachel@alabamadancecouncil.org) and we will try to answer them in future articles.

References:

- Patricios JS, Schneider KJ, Dvorak J, et al. Consensus statement on concussion in sport: the 6th international conference on concussion in sport - Amsterdam. Br J Sports Med. 2023.
- Ojofeitimi S, McIntyre L, Barchi, et al. Guidelines for returning to dance following concussion: Adaptations from sport concussion literature. Int J Clin Pract. 2024.

About the Author:



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