



# EQUESTRIAN-SPECIFIC RETURN-TO-SPORT (RTS) STRATEGY

*The below guide is for informational purposes only. It is not intended to provide or replace medical advice. You should seek the guidance of a licensed healthcare provider to determine the appropriate treatment and rehabilitation for your medical conditions.*

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Monitoring for the resolution of concussion symptoms is the priority. While the athlete is being monitored, a return-to-sport strategy can be followed and should be guided by the athlete's symptom status and their healthcare provider. In addition, during the return-to-sport progression, a successful return to work/school and other cognitive activities outside of the sport without symptoms and back to baseline cognitive performance should be prioritized before return to competitive equestrian sport.

The Equestrian-Specific Return-to-Sport strategy (RTS) described below provides an example of a safe return to full training and competition. Athletes must obtain written clearance from a medical provider prior to returning to USEF competitions after Stage 6.

Each step should be separated by at least 1-2 days. Prior to the start of Stage 3 (the integration of equestrian activities), the athlete should be completely free of concussion symptoms; including symptom-free integration of all cognitive activities such as baseline school and work duties. If the athlete is younger than 18 years old, a longer recovery time interval between each step is recommended. If the athlete experiences new or recurring symptoms with Stage 2 or beyond, they should pause the progression (i.e. repeat the prior stage), wait for symptoms to resolve, then restart at the previous symptom-free stage. It is important to note that too early of a return to sport after an initial concussion increases the risk for second impact syndrome which can result in a more severe traumatic brain injury sustained from a second impact occurring before the first concussion fully resolves.



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## STAGE 1: Initial Recovery

Begins after suspected concussion, no sporting activities, limit screen time, symptom limited physical and brain rest.



After 2 days, can start Stage 2\*\* with medical advice.

## STAGE 2: Light Physical Activity\*\*

Can include light activities such as walking, stationary bike, stretching exercises of 5-20 minutes duration. Gradual reintroduction of work/school activities as tolerated. No strength training or high intensity activities. Activities should be without risk of falling or hitting the head. No horse riding or driving related activities.

*Goal: increase heart rate with light activity without increasing concussion symptoms*



Concussion symptom free for 1-2 days at rest and exercising at this level, begin stage 3. If not, continue stage 2.

## STAGE 3: Unmounted Equestrian Discipline Specific Exercises

No activities with risk of head injury. Brisk walk or jogging. Walk or jog a course or pattern without a horse. Helmet use when in contact with a horse for grooming or barn chores. Add in light to moderate intensity activities such as swimming, jogging, body weight exercises, jump rope, as tolerated.



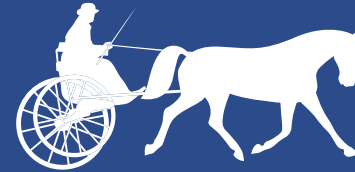
Concussion symptom free for 1-2 days at rest and exercising at this level, begin stage 4. If not, continue stage 3.

*\*\*During stage 2, monitor for mild and brief exacerbation of symptoms associated with activity, with an increase of no more than 2 points, on a 0-10 point scale, when compared to baseline prior to the start of the activity. If more than a mild >2/10 exacerbation of symptoms occurs, the athlete should stop the activity and wait until the following day to resume the activity.*



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## STAGE 4: Return to Light Equestrian Discipline Specific Riding or Activities



Consider riding or driving the horse on a lead line with a trainer and selecting a quiet, safe location such as an arena on a quiet horse. Helmet use at all times when in contact with a horse on the ground, when mounted on a horse or while seated in a cart. Start with short duration (10-15 min) horseback walk or in a driving cart on large circles or straight lines and gradually add in halt transitions and direction changes as tolerated. No unsupervised riding or driving. As tolerated during progression, the athlete can incorporate posting trot or trot and jog transitions and add in smaller circles, patterns and direction changes. No jumping or obstacles.

*Goal: restore confidence and equestrian discipline specific skills and balance*

Concussion symptom free for 1-2 days at rest and exercise, begin stage 5. If not, continue stage 4.

## STAGE 5: Full Practice



The athlete can incrementally increase complexity and challenge of riding as tolerated adding canter transitions, ground poles, individual jumps and obstacles progressing in height gradually over the course of days to weeks. All horse-specific activities should be under observation by trained personnel. Increase equestrian specific demands to the level of the athlete and prior intensity and duration of equestrian-specific activities to determine if there are any persisting concussion signs or symptoms.

Concussion symptom free for 1-2 days at rest and exercise, begin stage 6. If not, continue stage 5.

## STAGE 6: Return to Competitive Equestrian Specific Discipline

Medical release form must be submitted by athlete and signed by medical provider prior to return to USEF competition.

*Goal: Full participation of equestrian practice without restriction and without any concussion related symptoms.*

