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# Post-Concussion “Return to Learn/Return to Academics”

## About this approach

The Cornell University / Cornell Health “Return to Learn / Return to Academics” Post-Concussion Approach typically consists of several 30-minute visits with a Behavioral Health Consultant (BHC) specifically trained in this intervention.

- Cornell encourages any student who has experienced a concussion to meet with a BHC to receive “Return to Learn” support.
- If, following a concussion, you become concerned about your adjustment back to the academic setting, ask your Primary Care Provider for a referral to a BHC for this intervention.
- There is no time limit following a concussion to receive assistance with “Return to Learn / Return to Academics.”
- It is especially important to follow up with a BHC if you are experiencing any cognitive or emotional difficulty.

## Self-management

By using the following technique, you can give your brain adequate breaks while still engaging academically:

### Adapted Pomodoro Technique in combination with Thought Log

This technique expresses the importance of utilizing timers, and the importance of taking 2-minute “brain breaks” after engaging in 30 minutes of cognitive tasks (academic work of any kind – studying, attending classes, etc.) for a period of 2 hours.

- Ideally you will engage in a 30-minute cognitive task, then take a 2-minute break (closing your eyes, not engaging with your phone or anything / anyone else), and repeat, for a total of 2 hours.
- While engaging in a cognitive task, we encourage you to keep a thought log / to-do list, as it is important that you not engage in any other task until that 2 hour period is done. You can write down a thought, acknowledge it, and then go back to what you’re doing.
- You may also choose to leave class after 30 minutes to take a 2-minute brain break.

## Relaxation techniques

### Progressive muscle relaxation exercises

Progressive muscle relaxation is an exercise that relaxes your mind and body by progressively



*Practicing self-care, including brain breaks and relaxation techniques, can help you recover from a concussion and have a successful return to academics.*

tensing and relaxing muscle groups throughout your entire body.

- You will tense each muscle group vigorously, but without straining, and then suddenly release the tension and feel the muscle relax. You will tense each muscle for about 5 seconds.
- If you have any pain or discomfort at any of the targeted muscle groups, feel free to omit that body part.
- Throughout this exercise, you may visualize the muscles tensing and a wave of relaxation flowing over them as you release that tension.
- It is important that you breathe calmly throughout this exercise.

### Visualization Exercises / Guided Imagery

Visualization is “internal” and self-directed. For example, you might visualize somewhere beautiful and serene. You can use all of your senses to imagine that place. Envision yourself in this relaxation setting several minutes a day.

Although similar to visualization, guided imagery is facilitated by another person. This ancient practice:

- includes visualization
- is safe and simple to do
- focuses on images but helps you harness all your senses – sight, taste, sound, smell, and sensation
- helps you connect to your inner resources for improving health

You can often use websites like YouTube, or apps like Calm, InsightTimer, or Headspace to find a “Guide” to help you along in your visualization/imagery practice.

## Meditation

Meditation isn't just about sitting in silence and trying to turn off your thoughts or feelings. Instead, you learn to observe your thoughts and feelings without judgment. Eventually, you may start to better understand them as well.

- “Let’s Meditate” free mindfulness meditation sessions are offered daily (Monday–Friday) across campus during the semester. Learn more and get the schedule at [health.cornell.edu/LetsMeditate](http://health.cornell.edu/LetsMeditate).
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) offers Mindfulness Meditation Groups: [health.cornell.edu/groups](http://health.cornell.edu/groups).
- Dial-a-Meditation 607-254-CALM (2256) is a Cornell Wellness initiative that provides an audio recording where you may select 1 minute up to 5 minutes of guided meditation.
- And as always, feel free to follow up with your Behavioral Health Consultant or Primary Care Provider for more information.