



**STRENGTH IN PAIN
FOUNDATION**

SURFER'S CONCUSSION & BRAIN INJURY GUIDE

RECOGNIZE. RECOVER. **PROTECT YOUR BRAIN.**



**KNOW THE SIGNS.
TAKE ACTION.
STAY IN THE LINEUP.**

This guide is here to help surfers recognize concussion symptoms, understand recovery options, and protect long-term brain health.

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**RESPECT THE OCEAN.
KNOW YOUR LIMITS.
YOUR BRAIN IS IRREPLACEABLE.**

2 CONCUSSIONS IN SURFING

Concussions can happen anywhere at anytime. Surfing involves inherent risks, both from direct impacts and from the forces of the ocean.

COMMON WAYS CONCUSSIONS HAPPEN



BOARD IMPACT

Surfboard to the head.



COLLISION

Hitting another surfer.



REEF OR BOTTOM IMPACT

Impact with the reef or ocean floor.



WAVE HOLD-DOWN

Held under by a wave.



VIOLENT WIPEOUT

Thrown around in white water.

Contrary to popular belief, getting violently shaken by white water while duck diving or after a wipeout can cause a concussion or “sub-concussion”.



REPETITIVE SMALLER IMPACTS OR VIOLENT SHAKING FROM WIPEOUTS MAY CONTRIBUTE TO BRAIN STRESS OVER TIME.

Research is ongoing on how these impacts affect the brain. Minimizing repeated head trauma is smart.



THE BIG PICTURE

Repetitive sub-concussions can lead to Post Concussion Syndrome and even CTE (Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy), which has been linked to repetitive head injuries in contact sports.

While some risk is unavoidable, surfers can take proactive steps to protect their brains and support long-term health.



SMART SURFER TIP

If you're heading into larger, more powerful waves—on a surf trip or during a big swell—consider Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT) before and after to support recovery and reduce inflammation.



Hydrate



Eat Clean



Rest & Recover

These simple habits make a big difference.



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3 WHAT TO DO IMMEDIATELY

A simple plan can protect your brain and speed recovery.

If you think you've had a concussion, follow these steps and give your brain the best chance to heal.



STEP-BY-STEP RECOVERY PLAN

FIRST 24 HOURS



Get medical evaluation

Have a professional rule out serious injury.



Rest your brain and body

Limit physical and mental exertion.



Hydrate well

Drink plenty of water.



Avoid alcohol, drugs and caffeine

These can slow your recovery.



Avoid another head impact

This is critical for recovery.

NEXT SEVERAL DAYS



Follow medical advice

Your provider will guide your recovery.



Gradually return to normal activities

When symptom-free at rest and with light activity.



Limit screen time

Reduce time if symptoms are present.



Monitor symptoms

If they worsen, seek help.



Be patient

Recovery takes time. Pushing too soon can set you back.

IMPORTANT REMINDERS



NO SURFING

until your symptoms have resolved and you are cleared by a professional.



THERE WILL BE ANOTHER SWELL.

Your brain health comes first.



IF SYMPTOMS PERSIST

see a provider experienced in treating brain injury. We can help you find one.



NEVER RETURN TO SURFING THE SAME DAY

if you suspect a concussion. Your brain needs time to heal, not another hit.



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POST-CONCUSSION SYNDROME (PCS)

Some people experience symptoms that last weeks, months, or longer after a concussion.

This is known as Post-Concussion Syndrome.

COMMON SYMPTOMS

-  Headaches or pressure
-  Dizziness / Vertigo
-  Brain fog
-  Memory problems
-  Trouble concentrating
-  Fatigue
-  Sleep disturbances
-  Irritability
-  Anxiety or depression
-  Light and noise sensitivity
-  Changes in mood or behavior



WHY SYMPTOMS HAPPEN

A concussion can cause temporary disruption in how your brain cells communicate and how your brain uses energy.

This can affect thinking, mood, sleep, and overall daily function.

Rest, time, and the right support can help your brain heal.



YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

Persistent symptoms are real and treatable.

With the right care and guidance, most people improve over time.

Don't ignore symptoms—your brain is worth it.



PCS CAN AFFECT:



THINKING

Focus, memory, processing speed



EMOTIONS

Mood, patience, stress levels



PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

Energy, balance, and sleep quality



Everyone's recovery is different. Be patient, listen to your body, and give yourself grace.



WHEN TO SEEK HELP



Symptoms worsen or don't improve over time.



Headaches become severe or different than usual.



Confusion, slurred speech, or trouble finding words.



Vision changes or sensitivity to light gets worse.



Any new or concerning symptoms.



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5 BRAIN RECOVERY TOOLBOX

Many tools may support recovery.

Talk with a knowledgeable provider to build your plan.



POTENTIAL TOOLS THAT MAY SUPPORT RECOVERY

 HYPERBARIC OXYGEN THERAPY (HBOT) May support brain healing by reducing inflammation and improving oxygen utilization. Evidence: Moderate	 NEUROFEEDBACK Trains the brain to regulate itself and improve function. Evidence: Moderate	 TRANSCRANIAL MAGNETIC STIMULATION (TMS) May help to modulate brain activity and support neural recovery. Evidence: Moderate	 PHYSICAL THERAPY Supports balance, vestibular function & neck health. Evidence: Moderate	 EXERCISE Improves blood flow, reduces fatigue, and boosts mood and cognition. Evidence: Strong	 NUTRITION Anti-inflammatory foods support brain repair and energy. Evidence: Strong
 SLEEP Restorative sleep is critical for brain recovery and memory. Evidence: Strong	 STRESS REDUCTION Meditation, breathwork & relaxation calm the nervous system and reduce stress. Evidence: Moderate	 COGNITIVE REHAB Strengthens memory, attention, processing speed & problem-solving. Evidence: Moderate	 CRANIOSACRAL THERAPY May support nervous system regulation and reduce imbalances. Evidence: Limited	 EMERGING THERAPIES Research is ongoing on psychedelics, peptides, stem cells, and more. Evidence: Emerging	 SUPPLEMENTS & BIOHACKING Omega-3s, curcumin, magnesium & other nutrients may support healing. Evidence: Moderate



RECOVERY IS PERSONAL.

What works for one person may not work for another. A personalized plan combining the right tools, consistency, and professional guidance gives you the best chance to heal and thrive.

A WHOLE-BRAIN APPROACH

The brain works as a system. Treating the whole person—mind, body, and environment—leads to stronger, longer-lasting results.



ROLE OF YOUR CARE TEAM

Work with clinicians who understand brain injury. They can help you create a step-by-step plan, track progress, and adjust along the way.



Medical Provider



Physical Therapist



Mental Health Professional



Nutritionist



Wellness Coach



SMALL STEPS TODAY. LASTING IMPACT TOMORROW.

Your brain has the ability to heal. Give it the tools and time it needs.



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RETURNING TO SURFING SAFELY AND SMARTLY

Surfing is worth the wait.

A gradual return helps protect your brain and supports long-term recovery.

A GRADUAL RETURN PLAN

1



SYMPTOM-FREE AT REST

No symptoms at rest, with school/work, and with light exercise.

Duration: At least 24–48 hours

2



LIGHT ACTIVITY

Walk, gentle cardio, and basic bodyweight exercises.

Duration: 1–2 days

3



MODERATE ACTIVITY

Increase activity intensity. Add sport-specific movements off the board.

Duration: 1–2 days

4



RETURN TO SURF (EASY SESSIONS)

Short, easy sessions in smaller surf with plenty of rest.

Duration: 2–3 days

5



FULL RETURN

Gradually return to regular surfing and demanding conditions.

Duration: Ongoing



MOVE TO THE NEXT STEP ONLY WHEN YOU ARE SYMPTOM-FREE AT EACH LEVEL.

If symptoms return, go back to the previous step and give your brain more time.



Healing is not linear. Good days and tough days are normal. Progress isn't just about doing more—it's about doing it right.

WHEN IN DOUBT, SIT IT OUT.

Your future in the water depends on your brain today.

TIPS FOR A SAFE RETURN



Choose smaller, cleaner waves. Avoid heavy or crowded lineups.



Keep sessions short at first. Quality over quantity.



Bring a buddy. They can help monitor you.



Check in with yourself. Ask: How does my brain feel before, during, and after?



Prioritize rest and recovery. Sleep is when healing happens.



RED FLAGS: STOP AND SEEK HELP

Stop activity and contact a healthcare professional if you experience:

- Worsening headache
- Repeated vomiting
- Seizures
- Weakness or numbness
- Slurred speech
- Extreme drowsiness
- Confusion or agitation
- Loss of consciousness
- Any symptom that significantly worsens



PROTECT YOUR BRAIN. PROTECT YOUR PASSION.

Taking the time to heal now helps you stay in the water for years to come. Smart choices today lead to stronger sessions tomorrow.



You can't stop the waves, but you can protect your brain. Surf another day.



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7 PREVENTION TODAY PROTECTS TOMORROW

You can't control every wave, but you can control what you do to protect your brain.

Smart choices in and out of the water lead to stronger sessions and a healthier future.



PROTECT YOUR BRAIN



KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Paddle out within your skill level and respect conditions.



AVOID RECKLESS BEHAVIOR

Big drops, heavy shorebreak, and risky maneuvers increase your risk.



LOOK OUT FOR OTHERS

Help fellow surfers and communicate in the lineup.



TAKE IMPACTS SERIOUSLY

Even if you feel fine, get checked after a significant hit.



TRACK AND LEARN

Keep track of past head injuries. Each one matters.



EQUIPMENT MATTERS

The right gear can help reduce impact and support safer surfing.



HELMETS

Designed for water impact. Consider wearing one in heavy or crowded conditions.



BOARD CHOICE

Choose the right board for your skill level and the conditions.



LEASHES

Use a quality leash and avoid wrapping it around your head or body.



LINEUP AWARENESS

Position yourself where you can see what's happening and have an exit plan.

A LIFESTYLE THAT SUPPORTS BRAIN HEALTH



EAT TO FUEL

Whole foods, healthy fats, and antioxidants support brain repair and performance.



STAY HYDRATED

Dehydration can increase fatigue and slow recovery.



SLEEP WELL

Deep, consistent sleep is when your brain heals.



MANAGE STRESS

Meditation, breathwork, and time in nature reduce inflammation and support mood.



MOVE YOUR BODY

Regular exercise improves blood flow, mood, and cognitive function.



GET SUNLIGHT

Vitamin D and natural light support mood, sleep, and overall brain health.



STRONGER TOGETHER

The surf community is built on respect, connection, and looking out for one another.

By protecting our brains, we protect our passion, our future, and the ocean way of life.



KNOW THE SIGNS

If you or someone else shows any of these signs after a hit, take it seriously.

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Nausea or vomiting
- Balance problems
- Memory issues
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Feeling "off"
- Loss of consciousness

WHEN IN DOUBT, SIT IT OUT.



RESPECT THE OCEAN. RESPECT YOUR BRAIN.

The ocean will always be here. Make sure your brain is, too. Surf smart. Stay safe. And keep doing what you love.



Every wave is a gift. Protect your mind so you can enjoy it for a lifetime.



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8 FINAL TIPS

STAY STRONG, STAY SMART

Every wave is different. Every brain is different.
Listen to your brain, respect the process,
and never stop advocating for your health.



YOUR BRAIN IS IRREPLACEABLE

Treat it with care—today and every day.



RECOVERY TAKES TIME

Patience now leads to stronger sessions later.



LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

You know your baseline.
Trust yourself.



YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Support, community, and the right care make all the difference.



RESPECT THE OCEAN

It will always be here.
Your brain needs to be, too.



PROGRESS IS NOT LINEAR

Small steps forward, even on tough days, are still progress.



YOU HAVE RESOURCES.

Use them. Share them. Support others.



EDUCATION

Learn about brain injury, concussion, and recovery strategies.



PROFESSIONAL CARE

Work with providers who understand brain injury.



COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Connect with others who get it.
You are not alone.



ADVOCATE

Speak up for your brain health.
Help create awareness.



VISIT OUR RESOURCES PAGE

Scan the QR code to access trusted resources, guides, and tools to support your brain health and recovery.

strengthenpainfoundation.com/resources



KEEP SURFING. KEEP HEALING. KEEP SHOWING UP.

Your brain is strong. You are stronger.
Together, we can build a future with more awareness, better care, and better outcomes for every surfer.

STAY SAFE. STAY INFORMED. STAY INSPIRED.



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— STRENGTH. RECOVERY. HOPE.

Strength in Pain Foundation is dedicated to improving the lives of those affected by brain injury through education, support, advocacy, and research.



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