

# AAN: Doctors have ethical obligation to educate, protect athletes from concussion

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The American Academy of Neurology (AAN), the largest professional association of neurologists and a leading authority on sports concussion, is releasing a new position paper that states doctors have an ethical obligation to educate and protect athletes from sports concussion and clear them to play only when the athlete is medically ready, standing firm against objections from players, parents or coaches. The statement is published in the July 9, 2014, online issue of *Neurology*, the medical journal of the AAN, and is being released ahead of The Sports Concussion Conference, July 11-13, 2014, in Chicago, where the AAN will share the latest scientific advances in diagnosing and treating sports concussion.

The AAN position statement calls for doctors to safeguard the future mental and physical health of athletes as a top priority, especially regarding return-to-play decision-making. Physicians also must educate patients and their families about the dangers of [concussion](#) in all relevant sports, according to the statement.

The Academy has spent several years analyzing all of the available research and ethical issues to develop this official position paper, which corresponds with the AAN's guideline on sports concussion.

"With nearly four million sports-related concussions in the US each year, it is imperative doctors are educated and protect these athletes who may have sustained a concussion," said lead author Matthew P. Kirschen, MD, PhD, a neurologist with The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

and a member of the American Academy of Neurology. "Concussions can have devastating effects such as short-term impairments in athletes' cognitive and athletic performance. Repeat concussions have been linked to long-term impairments in brain function, such as problems with learning, memory and behavior."

The statement also:

- Supports wider use of baseline cognitive testing
- Recommends that concussion evaluation and management training be added to neurology residency programs
- Suggests the development of a national concussion registry with mandatory reporting, which may help to document more rigorously the incidence and recurrence of concussion at all levels of play

Ethically, the statement concludes that physicians caring for athletes during and after a sports-related concussion should have adequate training and experience in the recognition and evaluation of both the existence and severity of potential brain injury.

"These strategies could help identify the threshold at which the number and severity of head injuries leads to irreversible brain injury. They may also help to clarify how concussion risk varies with factors like age, gender, puberty stage and ethnicity so athletes and parents can make informed decisions about playing contact sports," said Kirschen.

Because sports concussion is a major issue in the world of health care and staying up-to-date on the latest research in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of concussion is critical for any neurology professional, the American Academy of Neurology is hosting its first The Sports Concussion Conference, July 11-13, 2014, in Chicago. Attendees will learn how to apply the latest advances in the diagnosis and treatment of

[sports concussion](#); understand post-concussion syndrome, including neurocognitive testing; apply skills to the professional, collegiate and high school arenas; and better understand the related controversies, second impact syndrome and more. Follow #AANSCC to receive updates from The Sports Concussion Conference.

Provided by American Academy of Neurology

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