

What is a Traumatic Brain Injury?

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is a disruption of function in the brain resulting from a blow or jolt to the head or penetrating head injury. Not all blows or jolts to the head result in a TBI.

The severity of such an injury may range from “mild,” a brief change in mental status of consciousness (also known as a concussion), to “severe,” which is an extended period of unconsciousness or amnesia after the injury.

It is important to note that the term mild TBI describes the injury, not necessarily the number or severity of symptoms.



What causes TBI?

- Blow to the head
- Falls
- Motor vehicle-traffic crashes
- Blasts

Who is at Risk for TBI?

- Some military duties increase the risk of sustaining a traumatic brain injury
- Participating in contact sports can be a factor

- Risky behavior such as speeding or not wearing protective equipment
- Males have twice the risk as females; highest risk is for males aged 15–24

Symptoms of mild TBI (also called a Concussion):

- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Excessive fatigue (tiredness)
- Concentration problems
- Forgetting things (memory problems)
- Irritability
- Sleep problems
- Balance problems
- Ringing in the ears
- Vision changes

What if you believe you had a mild TBI?

- Seek a medical evaluation immediately
- Tell your provider about your injury event
- Explain your symptoms to your provider:
 - What symptoms
 - When they started
 - How they are affecting you
- Follow the recovery tips in this brochure. However, this brochure is not a substitute for a medical evaluation.

Rehabilitation & Reintegration Division (R2D)

Office of The Surgeon General
U.S. Army Medical Department
Health Policy & Services Directorate
www.armymedicine.army.mil/prr



Important Information For Every Soldier Regarding Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)



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Recovery from TBI

Recovery from TBI depends on the individual and the type of brain injury.

Predicting the course and timeline of TBI recovery is difficult. Severe injuries have a more predictable course than mild or moderate injuries. Symptoms after mild TBI/concussion typically improve within hours to days and resolve within weeks. Even if you've had more than one concussion, full recovery is expected. Get at least 7-8 hours of sleep at night, and don't over exert yourself during the day.

The road to recovery will be enhanced if you take precautions and follow these instructions:

- Return to normal activities gradually, not all at once.
- Avoid activities that can lead to a second brain injury, such as contact or recreational sports, until cleared by a physician.
- Don't drink alcohol; it may slow your brain recovery and puts you at further risk of injury.
- If it's harder to remember things, write them down. This way you can keep track of important items.
- Place personal items such as keys, wallet, etc. in the same place each day. This will help you remember where they are.
- If you are easily distracted or having difficulty concentrating, try doing only one thing at a time in a quiet, non-distracting environment.

- If you feel irritable, remove yourself from the situation. It's helpful to use relaxation techniques to manage your anger. Irritability is worse when you are tired, so plenty of rest will help.



- Be patient! Healing from a brain injury takes time. You have to allow your mind and body enough time to heal from the injury.
- Take only prescribed medications and inform your provider of all vitamins and supplements you are taking and also when you stop them.

What happens during Rehabilitation?

The majority of people with TBI recover with little or no specific medical intervention. This is because the majority of TBI's are mild. The main treatment for mild TBI is rest and education. Following the recovery tips in this brochure will help.

It is especially important to prevent a second TBI while recovering.

Some people with TBI require specialty evaluation and intervention if they had a more severe injury or are not recovering quickly from a mild injury. In this case, you may work with a diverse team of healthcare professionals.

The medical team can vary depending on the type and severity of injury and the needs of the patient. The team may include a wide range of physicians, nurses, behavioral health specialists and rehabilitation specialists. This team will work with you to help you reach your highest functional level possible.



Protective Equipment

There are various ways that you can protect yourself and reduce your risk of sustaining a traumatic brain injury:

- Always use safety equipment such as a seat belt or helmet when you operate a vehicle.
- Make sure protective equipment is properly fitted, kept in good condition and functioning correctly.
- Wear appropriate protective equipment when participating in sporting events.