



Department of
Veterans Affairs

Quick Guide - Patient/ Family: Traumatic Brain Injury

MIRECC
Mental Illness
Research,
Education and
Clinical Center



Post Deployment Mental Health

Brain injuries are the “signature wounds” of our Global War on Terrorism. Returning combat veterans may not know they have suffered such a wound. That is why VA doctors want these “new warriors” and their families to have this information.

If the head is hit or shaken , a “concussion” or “closed head injury” can result. Concussion is seldom life threatening, so doctors often use the term “mild” when the person is only dazed or confused or loses consciousness for a short time. However, concussion can result in serious symptoms. People who survive multiple concussions may have more serious problems.

Common Symptoms of Brain Injury

- ★ “I just don’t feel like myself”
- ★ Feeling light-headed or dizzy
- ★ Difficulty organizing daily tasks
- ★ Blurred vision or eyes tire easily
- ★ Headaches or ringing in the ears
- ★ Feeling sad, anxious or listless
- ★ Easily irritated or angered
- ★ Feeling tired all the time
- ★ Trouble with memory, attention, or concentration
- ★ More sensitive to sounds, lights or distractions
- ★ Impaired decision making or problem solving
- ★ Difficulty inhibiting behavior - impulsive
- ★ Slowed thinking, moving, speaking or reading
- ★ Easily confused, feeling easily overwhelmed
- ★ Change in sleep - much more or much less
- ★ Change in sexual interest or behavior

People who have had a concussion may say that they are “fine” although their behavior or personality has changed. If you notice such changes in a family member or friend, suggest they get medical help.

Recovery Following Brain Injury

Some symptoms may be present immediately. Others may appear much later. People experience brain injuries differently. Speed of recovery varies from person to person. Most people with mild injuries recover fully, but it can take time. In general, recovery is slower in older persons. People with a previous brain injury may find that it takes longer to recover from their current injury. Some symptoms can last for days, weeks, or longer.

Talk to your health care provider about any troubling symptoms or problems.

To Promote Healing & Manage Symptoms

Things That Can Help

- ★ Get plenty of rest & sleep
- ★ Increase activity slowly
- ★ Carry a notebook - write things down if you have trouble remembering
- ★ Establish a regular daily routine to structure activities
- ★ Do only one thing at a time if you are easily distracted - turn off the TV or radio while you work
- ★ Check with someone you trust when making decisions

Things That Can Hurt

- ★ Avoid activities that could lead to another brain injury - examples include contact sports, motorcycles, skiing
- ★ Avoid alcohol as it may slow healing of the injury
- ★ Avoid caffeine or “energy-enhancing” products as they may increase symptoms
- ★ Avoid pseudoephedrine-containing products as they may increase symptoms - check the labels on cough, cold, and allergy medicines
- ★ Avoid excessive use of over-the-counter sleeping aids - they can slow thinking and memory

Resources for More Information & Help: Centers for Disease Control <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/tbi>
 Defense & Veterans Brain Injury Center <http://www.dvbic.org>
 Brain Injury Association <http://www.biausa.org>