

## Mild Traumatic Brain Injury

Mild Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is more commonly known as a “*concussion*” or a “*closed head injury*”. It can occur in a variety of ways such as when the head is struck during a fall, when an object hits the head, or when the head is suddenly jerked. You may have experienced a brief loss of consciousness or may have been simply dazed or confused. Mild TBI is sometimes called the “unseen injury”. It is called this because sometimes the symptoms are mild and do not appear for days or weeks after the injury. Also, the injury may make it hard for people to recognize or to admit that they are having problems. The signs of a TBI may be very subtle. People may look fine even though they’re acting or feeling differently.

### So What Happened?

A mild TBI means the brain’s functions are upset by some kind of insult. Nerve fibers can be stretched and torn in the brain when you hit or “jolted” your head. Brain cells may not function or communicate as they once did. This damage generally does not show up on the CT scan but your signs and symptoms tell us you have a concussion or mild TBI. These signs and symptoms are as follows:

- Headache
- Difficulty controlling your emotions
- Taking longer to do regular activities
- Forgetfulness
- Difficulty organizing your day
- Easily tired
- Dizziness
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Difficulty paying attention
- Irritability or personality changes
- Disrupted sleep

In most cases, the brain can heal itself. These symptoms may take some time to resolve. If you have a **sudden change** in any of the symptoms listed here, please seek medical attention right away.

## **Oh, my aching head!**

Headaches are very common after your injury. These are called post-concussive headaches. They can cause constant, mild, or severe pain. Most of the time post-concussive headaches go away after a few weeks, occasionally they don't.

Tips to manage post-concussive headaches:

1. Avoid loud noises
2. Relax the muscles in your head and neck
3. Pace yourself and provide yourself frequent breaks during the day
4. Lie down in a dark, quiet room, close your eyes and relax
5. Anti-inflammatory medications such as ibuprofen are best. Tylenol (acetaminophen) also seems to help. Narcotic pain medications do not seem to help post-concussive headaches

## **I feel so stupid!**

Language and problem solving skills are often affected by a mild TBI. When your brain is hurt it doesn't work as fast or as well. You might make mistakes, so be patient with yourself.

Tips to help:

1. Set small goals that are easy to reach
2. Break tasks into smaller ones and write down ways to complete each task
3. Think about things before you take action
4. Take a break when you are tired – this will help you think more clearly

## **Were you talking to me?**

Another sign of mild TBI is difficulty paying attention or staying on task. You may not be able to keep your mind on anything. You may jump from one thought to another or start something in the middle of something else.

Tips to help:

1. Do one thing at a time
2. Pace yourself, work slowly and don't try to force your brain to work any faster than it can
3. Stay in quiet places – lights, motion, and loud noises can distract you

## **Why can't I remember?**

Loss of memory is a common sign of mild TBI. You probably don't remember your accident or hospital stay. This is normal. Here are some ways to help you keep track of things:

1. Set up a daily routine
2. Write down your routine and review it throughout the day as needed
3. Stay focused - don't let anyone distract you from your routine

4. Keep important things in the same place

### **I'm not the same person!**

Many people have personality changes after a brain injury. You may get angry very quickly and scare your family and friends. You may start laughing or crying without knowing why. Try not to worry about these feelings. Many people return to normal after only a few weeks. If you get angry remind yourself of your injury and try to relax.

### **I'm dizzy!**

A mild TBI may cause inner ear problems. Symptoms are:

- Loss of balance
- Hearing loss
- Dizziness or nausea
- Ringing in the ears
- Blurred vision
- Headaches

Discuss any of these problems with us. We will refer you for further treatment if needed. For your safety, have a friend or family member with you at all times. **DO NOT DRIVE** if you have any of the above symptoms.

### **Family and Friends**

Choose trusted friends or family members as support people. You need people who will help look out for you. This will be most true right after your injury. Your friends and family may change the way they act around you. They may not understand your injury because you look fine or they may try to do everything for you. Talk with your loved ones about changes in you and share this information with them. Communication makes things easier.

Here are some tips for family and friends:

- Be patient – a brain takes time to heal
- Keep instructions simple and clear
- Talk to the person with the injury, not around him
- Accept that what is gone may never come back
- Accept the person with the brain injury for who he or she is – don't push them to be someone else
- Let the person with the brain injury do as much as they can for themselves
- They need your love and support to get better

## **There is help**

Some health care providers are trained to understand and treat problems caused by mild TBI. *Neuropsychologists* study how the brain affects the way you act. *Physiatrists* help injured people regain strength and control over their bodies. Speech therapists help you regain problem solving skills and organization of your thoughts, and physical therapists help with balance problems. We can arrange a visit to any or all of these providers if needed.

## **Depression**

Occasionally, a mild TBI can cause depression. Your injury may have hurt the part of your brain that controls your moods. You may feel like a piece of you is missing. Don't wait to get help. The right medicines and therapy will help. This is also a time to talk with trusted friend and family. Just talking about it may help you feel better.

## **Good News!**

Your mild TBI will most likely go away in a short time, but you must be patient. Most people who have headaches and other symptoms from a mild TBI, or concussion have a complete recovery. We will monitor your progress and refer you for further treatment if needed. Please call if you have any questions or need assistance. The Brain Injury Association can also provide information and references. Contact them at 1-800-444-6443 or visit their web site at [www.biausa.org](http://www.biausa.org).

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