



Proponency Office for Rehabilitation & Reintegration



Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Fact Sheet

What is TBI?

Traumatic Brain Injury can be defined as an injury to the head from a blunt or penetrating object. It can also come from rapid movement of the head that causes back and forth movement inside the skull. The severity of TBI can range from mild to severe. A mild TBI, also known as a concussion, occurs when there is a change in mental status (dinged, dazed, or "bell-rung") or a brief loss of consciousness (knocked out) after an injury event. Most people with a concussion completely recover.

Brain Injury is the Silent Epidemic

The majority of TBI is mild. It is often called the silent epidemic because most concussions go unreported. Even when an injury is more severe TBI may not be apparent. As a result, it remains a major health issue for the military. Unlike other injuries that change appearance, most often you can't see a brain injury.



What Causes TBI?

The Leading Causes of TBI ¹:

- Falls (28%)
- Motor vehicle traffic crashes (20%)
- Struck by/against events (19%)
- Assaults (11%)

Blasts are the leading cause of TBI for active duty military personnel in war.

Risk Factors:

- Males have twice the risk as females; the highest risk is for males age 15 – 24.
- Military duties increase the risk of sustaining a traumatic brain injury.
- Participating in contact sports can be a risk factor.
- Also, risky behavior such as speeding and not wearing a helmet may increase the risk.

Symptoms of Mild TBI, also known as a Concussion:

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

¹ Center for Disease Control and Prevention(CDC)

What are the Long Term Consequences of a Traumatic Brain Injury?

TBI can have a wide range of effects on:

- Health – weakness and balance
- Thinking – memory and reasoning
- Sensation – touch, taste, and smell
- Language – communication, expression, and understanding
- Emotion – depression, anxiety, personality changes, aggression, and social inappropriateness

TBI may increase the risk for conditions that become more prevalent with age, such as Alzheimer's Disease and Parkinson's Disease². When TBI is more severe or penetrating, it increases the risk of epilepsy.

How can TBI be prevented?

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 motor vehicle.
- Make sure protective equipment is properly fitted and kept in good condition for proper functioning.
- Always use appropriate and fitted protective equipment when playing sports because TBI injuries frequently occur during athletics and physical training.
- If you have a known or suspected traumatic brain injury or concussion seek evaluation from an appropriate health care professional before returning to normal duty or sports.

TBI Recovery

- Get plenty of sleep at night, and don't over exert yourself during the day.
- 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 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.
- If you find you are losing important items, begin putting them in the same place all the time. For example, if you keep misplacing your car keys, you should keep them in the same place.
- 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 help manage the situation. Irritability is worse when you are tired, so plenty of rest will help!!
- It's also important to **be patient!** Healing from a brain injury takes time. You have to allow your mind *and* body enough time to heal from the injury.

Remember: Symptoms of mild TBI (concussion) often resolve within hours to days and almost always improve in the first 1 – 3 months following injury. However, if symptoms persist and are not improving, you should go to your primary care clinic for an evaluation.

For More Information:

For more information, please contact the Proponency Office for Rehabilitation & Reintegration at 703-681-3051.

² Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center (DVBIC)