
What Is a Mild Traumatic Brain Injury (Concussion)?

A mild traumatic brain injury (TBI) is a sudden jolt to your head that causes the way your brain works to change for a short time. It is also called a concussion. This could be caused by a blow to your head or a blast. It could be caused by a sudden and severe movement of your head that bounces your brain inside your skull. Falls, fights, sports, and motor vehicle accidents are other common causes.

There are two other types of TBI: moderate TBI and severe TBI. Your healthcare team will see if your TBI is mild, moderate, or severe. Sometimes the symptoms of a mild TBI are like those of a more severe TBI. Every brain is different. So it can be hard to know what your symptoms mean or what your recovery will be like.

Diagnosing a mild TBI

Most TBIs are mild. If you have a mild TBI, you might be knocked out for a short time. Or you might just feel stunned for a while. Your healthcare provider will evaluate you to see if you have a mild TBI.

Diagnosing a mild TBI may be difficult. This is because symptoms are like those of other health conditions. Signs of TBI may not show up on brain scans or X-rays.

Neuropsychological testing can diagnose some forms of TBI. Your provider may base your diagnosis on:

- What your head injury looks like
- The types and severity of your symptoms
- Risk factors that can lead to a longer recovery period

Symptoms of a mild TBI

A mild TBI can change your brain in many ways. It can change the way you think, feel, or act. The kind of symptoms you have depends on where and how much your brain is affected. Common symptoms of a mild TBI can occur right away. Or they may occur a while after the injury. Early symptoms may include:

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Memory problems
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Vision problems

Later symptoms of a mild TBI may include:

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- Having headaches often
 - Feeling lightheaded
 - Not being able to focus or pay attention
 - Feeling tired most of the time
 - Getting angry and annoyed easily
 - Being bothered by bright light or loud noise
 - Having trouble focusing your eyes
 - Hearing ringing in your ears
 - Feeling anxious and depressed

Recovering from a mild TBI

Most people recover fully from a mild TBI. But it may take days, weeks, or months. For some, symptoms may last even longer. Also, if you have had more than one TBI, your recovery may take longer. So your recovery time will depend on how quickly your own brain is healing.

Don't return to sports or any activity that could cause you to hit your head until all symptoms are gone and you have been cleared by your healthcare provider. A second head injury before fully recovering from the first TBI can lead to serious brain injury.

There are different guidelines about when a person should return to work and daily activities. Some guidelines advise resting the brain for a period of time. Talk with your provider about the best plan for you.

You can expect to have some good days and some bad days. It's important to give your brain time to recover. Don't push yourself too hard. Trying to “tough it out” can make your symptoms worse. The best way to recover is to work closely with your provider. Talk with your family. And give your brain time to heal.