
Traumatic Brain Injury and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

A traumatic brain injury (TBI) is a jolt or blow to your head that changes the way your brain works. It can cause changes in the way you think, act, and feel. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) develops after a scary experience in your life. It can also change the way you think, act, and feel. PTSD can occur after events like accidents and assaults.

Being diagnosed with a TBI increases the chance that you will also have PTSD.

Symptoms of TBI and PTSD

Symptoms of TBI are different for everyone. They don't always depend on the severity of your injury. That's because everyone's brain is different. Common symptoms include headaches, dizziness, tiredness, memory loss, slowed thinking, and mood swings.

Traumatic events that can cause PTSD are events that cause fear and stress. TBI is just one example. Others include physical abuse, sexual assault, and serious accidents. Symptoms include reliving the event in flashbacks or nightmares, staying away from situations or people who trigger memories of the event, feeling numb, and feeling anxious and jittery.

TBI and PTSD can cause similar problems. These include:

- Feeling depressed
- Reliving the traumatic event
- Feeling anxious
- Staying away from situations that may remind you of a traumatic event
- Having problems with drinking or taking illegal drugs
- Having trouble at home or at work

Recovering from TBI and PTSD

One of the most important ways you can help yourself overcome both PTSD and TBI is to learn as much as you can about these health issues and work closely with your medical team. Knowing what to expect and what you can do reduces worry and stress.

The good news is that counseling for PTSD may help TBI as well. Two types of therapy that work well are cognitive processing therapy (CPT) and prolonged exposure (PE) therapy. In CPT, you learn about how to deal with your thoughts and feelings in a healthier way. In PE, you talk about your experience until the memory is no longer painful. EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing) is another form of therapy that may help.

Coping with TBI and PTSD

Many of the things you can do to help yourself recover from TBI will also help you recover from PTSD. Here are some of the self-care steps you can take:

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- Share your feelings with friends and loved ones.
 - Find ways to reduce stress, like deep breathing, listening to music, or exercising.
 - Be patient with yourself and make time for activities you enjoy.
 - Get your family involved in your recovery. Don't try to go it alone.
 - Get a good night's sleep. Try to go to bed and get up at about the same time every day.
 - Stay away from alcohol, illegal drugs, and tobacco.

Most people with TBI recover over time. But everybody's brain heals differently. Go at your own pace. Don't push yourself too hard. The same is true for PTSD. It takes time, and progress may come a little bit at a time.

Making bad decisions is a danger for people struggling with TBI and PTSD. Don't try to treat your symptoms with illegal drugs or alcohol. Call your healthcare provider if you are struggling or if your symptoms are getting worse. Some people benefit from medicines to control symptoms of TBI or PTSD. But side effects that affect memory may limit their usefulness.