



Mild Traumatic Brain Injury and Concussion: Information for Adults

Discharge Instructions

You were seen today for a mild traumatic brain injury (mild TBI) or concussion.



Use this handout to help you watch for changes in how you are feeling or acting and to help you feel better.



Be sure to let a family member or friend know about your injury and the types of symptoms to look out for. They may notice symptoms before you do and can help you.



Schedule a follow-up appointment with your regular doctor.

Due to your injury, you may need to take some time off from things like work or school. If so, ask your doctor for written instructions about when you can safely return to work, school, sports, or other activities such as driving a car, riding a bike, or operating heavy equipment.



Watch for Danger Signs

In rare cases, a dangerous blood clot that crowds the brain against the skull can develop after a TBI. The people checking on you should call 911 or take you to an emergency department right away if you have:

- A headache that gets worse and does not go away
- Significant nausea or repeated vomiting
- Unusual behavior, increased confusion, restlessness, or agitation
- Drowsiness or inability to wake up
- Slurred speech, weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination
- Convulsions or seizures (shaking or twitching)
- Loss of consciousness (passing out)

More information on mild TBI and concussion, as well as tips to help you feel better, can be found at www.cdc.gov/TraumaticBrainInjury.



Learn About Your Injury

Mild TBI and concussions are brain injuries. A mild TBI or concussion is caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body that causes:



The head and brain to move quickly back and forth.



The brain to bounce or twist in the skull from this sudden movement.



Chemical changes in the brain and sometimes stretching and damage to the brain cells.

Doctors may describe these injuries as “mild” brain injuries because they are usually not life-threatening. Even so, their effects can be serious.

Mild TBI and concussion signs and symptoms are part of the normal healing process.

Some mild TBI and concussion symptoms (listed at right) may appear right away, while other symptoms may not appear for hours or days after the injury. Symptoms generally improve over time, and most people will feel better within a couple of weeks. If you have symptoms that concern you or are getting worse, be sure to talk with your doctor.

Symptoms of mild TBI and concussion may affect how you feel, think, act, or sleep.

Symptoms of mild TBI and concussion are different for each person. Most people will have one or more symptoms that affect how they feel, think, act, or sleep. Symptoms may change during recovery. For example, you may have headaches and feel sick to your stomach right after the injury. A week or two after your injury you may notice other symptoms, like feeling more emotional than usual or having trouble sleeping.

Symptoms of Mild TBI and Concussion



Physical

- Bothered by light or noise
- Dizziness or balance problems
- Feeling tired, no energy
- Headaches
- Nausea or vomiting (early on)
- Vision problems



Thinking and Remembering

- Attention or concentration problems
- Feeling slowed down
- Feeling foggy or groggy
- Problems with short-term memory
- Problems with long-term memory
- Trouble thinking clearly



Emotional

- Anxiety or nervousness
- Irritability or easily angered
- Feeling more emotional
- Sadness



Sleep

- Sleeping *less* than usual
- Sleeping *more* than usual
- Trouble falling asleep

Understand Your Recovery

Start your recovery by resting. As symptoms improve, you may gradually return to regular activities.

Recovery from a mild TBI or concussion means you can do your regular activities without experiencing symptoms from the injury. Recovery may be slower among older adults. People who have had a brain injury in the past may also find that it takes longer to recover.

The First Few Days

- Start your recovery by resting. Symptoms are generally more severe the first few days after the injury.
- You may need to take a short time off from work or school, although usually no more than 2 to 3 days.
- Ask your doctor for written instructions about when you can safely return to work, school, or other activities, such as driving a car.



As You Start to Feel Better

- As you start to feel better after the first few days of your injury, you can gradually return to regular (non-strenuous) activities, such as taking a short walk.
- Avoid activities that make your symptoms come back or get worse.
- For a short time, you may need extra help or support, such as rest breaks or fewer hours at work or school.



When Symptoms Are Nearly Gone

- When your symptoms are mild and nearly gone, return to most regular activities.
- If your symptoms do not get worse during an activity, then that activity is OK for you.
- If your symptoms get worse, you should cut back on that activity.

Taking these steps may help speed your recovery:

- Avoid activities that can put you at risk for another injury to your head and brain.
- Stay connected to friends and family and talk with them about how you are feeling.
- Ask your doctor about medications that are safe to take during recovery to help with symptoms (for example, ibuprofen or acetaminophen for headaches).
- Limit screen time and loud music before bed, sleep in a dark room, and keep to a fixed bedtime and wake-up schedule.

Do not return to sports and recreational activities on the same day of your injury; wait until you get the OK from a doctor.

A repeat brain injury that occurs before the brain has fully healed may slow your recovery or increase the chance for long-term problems. This risk is especially a concern for teens and young adults. Returning to sports and recreational activities is a gradual process and should be carefully managed and monitored by your doctor.

If you do not think you are getting better or your symptoms are getting worse, tell your doctor.

Keep track of your mild TBI or concussion symptoms and share this information with your doctor. This information may help them identify the best treatments for your symptoms. You may also need to see a specialist who has experience treating brain injuries. Your doctor can help link you to brain injury specialists and services in your area.

If the injury is affecting your ability to work or go to school, talk with your employer or school about support services that may be available to you. If your injury was work-related, make sure you report it right away to your employer and your workers' compensation office.

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Additional Notes:

The information provided in this handout or through links to other sites is not a substitute for medical or professional care. Questions about diagnosis and treatment for concussion should be directed to your doctor or other healthcare provider.