

Quick Guide to Traumatic Brain Injury

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Brain injuries are becoming increasingly more common with changes in modern warfare. Returning combat veterans may not know they have suffered such a wound. That is why VA doctors want returning soldiers and their families to have this information.

If the head is hit or shaken severely, a "concussion" or "closed head injury" can result. Many types of forces can cause a brain injury. Examples include being hit on the head, being near an explosion, and being in a motor vehicle accident. A brain injury can happen in the absence of any external injury. However, it is important to remember that presence of external injury does not mean the brain has been injured.

Concussion is seldom life threatening, so doctors often use the term "mild" when the person is only dazed or confused or loses consciousness for a short time. However, concussion can result in serious symptoms. People who survive multiple concussions may have more serious problems. Here are some of the more common symptoms of brain injury.

Common Symptoms of Brain Injury

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| - "I just don't feel like myself" | - Feeling tired all the time | - Difficulty inhibiting behavior - impulsive |
| - Feeling light-headed or dizzy | - Trouble with memory, attention, or concentration | - Slowed thinking, moving, speaking or reading |
| - Difficulty organizing daily tasks | - More sensitive to sounds, lights or distractions | - Easily confused, feeling easily overwhelmed |
| - Blurred vision or eyes tire easily | - Impaired decision making or problem solving | - Change in sleep - much more or much less |
| - Headaches or ringing in the ears | | - Change in sexual interest or behavior |
| - Feeling sad, anxious or listless | | |
| - Easily irritated or angered | | |

People who have had a concussion may say that they are "fine" although their behavior or personality has changed. Changes such as these in a family member or friend suggest the need for medical help.

Recovery Following Brain Injury

Some symptoms may be present immediately. Others may appear much later. People experience brain injuries differently. Speed of recovery varies from person to person. Most people with mild brain injuries recover fully, but it can take time. Here are some things that can be done to promote healing, and to make symptoms easier to manage.

To Promote Healing and Manage Symptoms

Things That Can Help

- Get plenty of rest & sleep
- Increase activity slowly
- Carry a notebook - write things down if you have trouble remembering
- Establish a regular daily routine to structure activities
- Do only one thing at a time if you are easily distracted - turn off the TV or radio while you work
- Check with someone you trust when making decisions

Things That Can Hurt

- Avoid activities that could lead to another brain injury - examples include contact sports, motorcycles, skiing
- Avoid alcohol as it may slow healing of the injury
- Avoid caffeine or "energy-enhancing" products as they may increase symptoms
- Avoid pseudoephedrine-containing products as they may increase symptoms - check the labels on cough, cold, and allergy medicines
- Avoid excessive use of over-the-counter sleeping aids - they can slow thinking and memory

In general, recovery is slower in older persons. People with a previous brain injury may find that it takes longer to recover from their current injury. Some symptoms can last for days, weeks, or longer. Talk to your health care provider about any troubling symptoms or problems.

Resources for More Information & Help:

Centers for Disease Control <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/tbi>

Defense & Veterans Brain Injury Center <http://www.dvbic.org>

Brain Injury Association <http://www.biausa.org>

Brain Injury Association of NC www.bianc.net