

Symptoms of Mild Traumatic Brain Injury and Concussions

What is mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI)/concussion?

This is a common injury that often occurs after a blow to the head during sports, a fall, or a car accident. People often feel dazed or briefly lose consciousness. It is common to have brief memory loss just before, during, or right after the injury.

Symptoms

Most people with a concussion show some symptoms during the first few weeks after the injury. These include physical symptoms and changes in mood, sleep, or thinking abilities (shown below). These symptoms are not signs of permanent damage; they are common and part of normal recovery.

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

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.

Source: CDC

The table below shows the percent of people with mTBI who have such symptoms. Most people with concussions recover completely within 1 to 12 weeks. Resting at home for 1 week, then slowly increasing activity over the next weeks is best for most people.

Most Common Symptoms	Symptoms of mTBI: % of people	Symptoms of everyday stress: % of people
Poor concentration	71%	14%
Irritability	66%	16%
Tired a lot more	64%	13%
Depression	63%	20%
Memory problems	59%	20%
Headaches	59%	13%
Anxiety	58%	24%
Trouble thinking	57%	6%
Dizziness	52%	7%
Blurry or double vision	45%	8%
Sensitive to bright light	40%	14%

Source: Michigan TBI Services and Prevention Council

You may have these symptoms even after you recover since these symptoms are very similar to the symptoms of ordinary stress. The table on the first page shows the percent of people with these symptoms who have not had a head injury. Hitting your head, hospital visits, and the responsibilities of work or school all add stress to most people's lives. This added stress may be part of the reason for your symptoms.

Concussions can be frightening or traumatic. It is common to be thinking and worried about your symptoms. Too much focus on your symptoms can make them more noticeable and seem worse. It can be helpful to remember that most people have some symptoms after a concussion. These are often part of the normal recovery process and will get better.

Some symptoms you notice may not be related to your concussion. Many people report forgetting common things, like phone numbers, names, or where they parked. The table to the right lists things most people commonly forget.

Things People Normally Forget	% of People
Telephone numbers	58%
People's names	48%
Where car was parked	32%
Car keys	31%
Groceries	28%
Why they entered a room	27%
Directions	24%
Appointment dates	20%
Store location	20%
Items around the house	17%
Wallet or pocketbook	17%
Content of daily conversations	17%

Source: Michigan TBI Services and Prevention Council

Many people also report mood symptoms, sensitivity to light, and memory problems even without a head injury. It can be easy to forget that you may have had such symptoms even before the injury. If your symptoms last longer than 12 weeks, they may be due to other factors like changes in sleep, mood, or medicines, and further assessment may be helpful.

References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). *Mild Traumatic Brain Injury and Concussion: Information for Adults*. https://www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury/pdf/TBI_Patient_Instructions-a.pdf. Accessed July 24, 2023.
- Michigan TBI Services and Prevention Council (2008). *Recovering from Mild Traumatic Brain Injury/Concussion*, <https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/keep-mi-healthy/mentalhealth/mentalhealth/tbi/links/recovering-from-mild-traumatic-brain-injury-concussion>. Accessed July 24, 2023.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 10/2023 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#8307