Mild Traumatic Brain Injury (mTBI)/Concussion

A mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI), also known as an concussion happens after an injury, jolt, or blow to the head or body. This causes the head and brain to move back and forth very fast. This can happen in many situations, such as sports, falls, or car crashes. An mTBI is sometimes called an invisible injury because it is too small to be seen on a CT scan or MRI.

Symptoms
Symptoms are different for each person and may affect many parts of your health. Symptoms may start at any time.

Thinking and Memory
You may have trouble with thinking or memory, such as:

- Feeling slowed down
- Trouble focusing
- Trouble remembering new information

Physical
You may have physical symptoms, such as:

- Headache
- Blurry vision
- Nausea or vomiting
- Dizziness or feeling lightheaded
- Sensitivity to noise or light
- Balance problems
- Feeling tired or having low energy

Mood
You may have mood changes, such as feeling:

- Irritable
- Sad
- Nervous or anxious
- More emotional than usual

Sleep
You may have sleep problems, such as:

- Sleeping more or less than usual
- Trouble falling asleep

Recovery
Most people fully recover from a concussion without treatment. Talk to your doctor if you still have symptoms after 2 weeks. Recovery may take longer if you have a history of:

- Differences in learning
- Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Repeat concussions

Activity Restrictions
Rest your body and brain for the first 48 hours. During this time, limit how often you:

- Play sports
- Do heavy housework
- Read
- Have screen time

After 48 hours, you may slowly return to your normal routine. If symptoms get worse with activity, take breaks until symptoms improve.

Your provider may refer you to a speech, physical or occupational therapist.

Returning to Work or School
Returning to work and school is different for each person.

- **If you do not have symptoms,** you may return to work or school 24-48 hours after the injury.
- If **you have symptoms**, talk to your provider when you can return and how long you can be there.

Depending on your symptoms, you may be able to go for part of the day and slowly increase your hours as symptoms improve.

If you see a speech, physical, or occupational therapist, they may help find safe ways for you to return to work or school.

When to Call

Call your provider if your symptoms get worse or if they affect your daily routine.

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 © 5/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7264