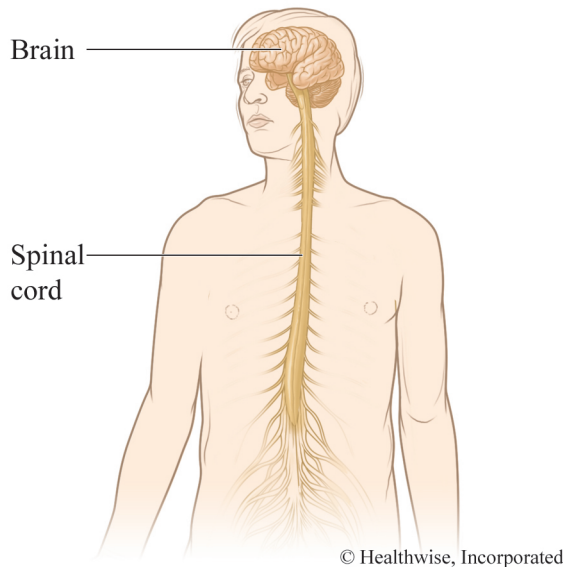




Traumatic Brain Injury



What is a traumatic brain injury?

A traumatic brain injury (TBI) is caused by a blow to the head or body, a fall, or another injury that jars or shakes the brain. This can cause bruising, swelling, or tearing of brain tissue. A TBI also may stretch, pull apart, or tear nerves or blood vessels, causing bleeding in or around the brain.

A TBI can range from a mild concussion to a severe or penetrating head injury.

What are the symptoms?

Mild TBIs, or concussions, may cause obvious symptoms, such as passing out or feeling lightheaded. These symptoms usually go away on their own, but it may take a few weeks or even months. Symptoms may take longer to go away if you have had a severe brain injury.

In rare cases, a severe TBI may lead to long-lasting problems with movement, learning, or speaking.

Sometimes after a TBI you may feel as if you are not functioning as well as you did before the injury, and you may develop new symptoms.

This is called postconcussive syndrome. You may:

- Have changes in your ability to solve problems, think, concentrate, or remember.
- Have headaches.
- Have changes in your sleep patterns, such as not being able to sleep or sleeping all the time.
- Have problems with balance. You may feel dizzy, lightheaded, or unsteady, and find it hard to stand or walk.
- Have changes in personality. You may become anxious or depressed, have rapid changes in emotion or mood, or lose interest in things you used to enjoy.

How is it treated?

Rest is the best treatment for a mild traumatic brain injury. Try to get plenty of sleep at night, and take rests during the day. It also may help to avoid noise and situations where there are a lot of people.

Your treatment also depends on how severe the brain injury is and what other problems or symptoms may develop. For example:

- People who have depression or anxiety after the injury may need medicines or counseling.
- People who have headaches or pain from the injury may need over-the-counter pain medicine, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), or naproxen (Aleve). Read and follow all instructions on the label. Do not use other nonprescription or prescription medicines for pain without your doctor's okay.
- In rare cases, people with severe TBIs may need surgery or specialized care.

What can you do at home?

- Don't drink alcohol or use illegal drugs. Alcohol and illegal drugs can slow your recovery and increase your chance of a second brain injury.
- Return to your normal activities gradually.
- Talk to your doctor about when to return to activities and sports. Being active again too soon increases your risk of having a more serious brain injury. Examples of activities to discuss with your doctor include riding a bike or motorcycle or doing sports such as skiing, where you could fall and hit your head.
- Avoid activities that are physically or mentally demanding (including housework, exercise, schoolwork, video games, or using the computer).
- Do not take any medicines unless your doctor says it is okay.

- Do not do things that require you to be alert until your doctor says these things are okay. This includes swimming, driving a car, and operating equipment.
- If you feel grumpy or irritable, get away from whatever is bothering you. Try to find a quiet place to relax and rest.
- Pace yourself and don't try to do too much. This can help you avoid feeling very tired, which often happens after a TBI.
- Be patient. Healing from a brain injury takes time.

Follow up

It's important to stay in touch with your doctor. Go to all follow-up visits. You may need tests to see if your brain is working the right way or if you have any problems.

Questions to ask your doctor

Use the space below to list your questions or concerns. Take this sheet with you to your next doctor visit.

Questions about traumatic brain injury