

Concussion Recovery

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www.msktc.org/tbi/factsheets

TBI Factsheet

This fact sheet is about concussions. It reviews symptoms, recovery, and long-term outcomes. It also talks about where to get support after a concussion.

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The Traumatic Brain Injury Model System is sponsored by the National Institute of Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Community Living. (See <http://www.msktc.org/tbi/model-system-centers> for more information).

What is a concussion?

A concussion is a mild traumatic brain injury (TBI) caused by a blow to the head which causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth. This can happen due to a car or bike crash, a fall, an assault, or a sports injury. In most cases, there are no lasting symptoms or ill effects from a concussion. During recovery, brain function and blood flow may be slightly changed and therefore it is best not to take part in rigorous activities (e.g., contact sports) that might lead to a second concussion for a few days to a week.

Recovering from concussion

Most concussion symptoms resolve within hours to days or a few months. Recovery is usually faster when a person gets some rest for a short period of time (e.g., a couple of days) and gradually returns to their activities and responsibilities over a week or so. Complete rest is not recommended, and instead, light exercise and mental activity may actually improve recovery. A small number of people may take longer to recover and need specific treatments. They could include specific support at work or school for a short period of time such as days or a few weeks while they recover.

Common symptoms of concussion

People with concussions may have temporary symptoms for a brief period of time that include a combination of headaches, poor concentration, fatigue, memory problems, dizziness, and nausea. People may feel irritable and have changes in mood or sleep. They may also have trouble thinking clearly, short-term disorientation, blurry or double vision, and be sensitive to bright light or noise.

Course of recovery

The common symptoms of concussion listed above are part of the recovery process; they are not signs of permanent damage or complications. These symptoms are normal, like the itch of stitches that are healing. Most people with a concussion who have symptoms recover in hours or a week to a few months. If you are older than 40, it may take a bit longer to get back to normal. Symptoms usually go away without treatment.

What can I do about my symptoms?

Some people who have had a concussion find it hard to do daily activities or their job during recovery. They may also find it hard to get along with everyone at home, or to relax. Pace yourself and be sure to get the rest you need. If your symptoms get worse, or if you have new symptoms, it may be a sign that you are pushing yourself too hard. Slow down and take care of yourself. For most people, after the injury, it is best to relax for a few hours or days and then slowly increase activity over the course of a week. Remember that symptoms are a normal part of recovery; they will usually go away on their own.

Many of the symptoms of concussion may also be due to stress, anxiety or pain. Many people have some of these symptoms once in a while even without having a concussion. Some of your symptoms may be similar to the symptoms of everyday stress that all people experience. A pulled muscle or a bruised leg needs time to heal; your brain does as well. You may have some trouble with work or school at first. This may be stressful, but it is normal. Trying to do your regular work right after a concussion is like trying to play baseball or swim with a pulled muscle. If you have concerns about your recovery, talk to your doctor. Most children and athletes with sports-related concussions need a doctor's release in order to return to play.

Concussion and outcomes

As noted above, there should be no long-term difficulties after a concussion and healing occurs relatively quickly. You may have heard of a disease called chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE. A disease thought to be caused by repeated brain injury, CTE is poorly understood at this time. Most studies of CTE have used elite athletes with a long history of physical trauma. Based on existing evidence, experts think that one or two concussions do not lead to long-term conditions such as CTE, dementia, or Parkinson's disease.

Where can I go for support?

Most people find it helpful to get support from their friends and family after a concussion. They also look to health care providers like doctors, nurses, and psychologists who specialize in brain injury when possible for advice and support during recovery. But this is not always enough. Since you or your family member had a concussion, you may want to talk to other people who have been through similar experiences. Many support groups exist for people who have had a TBI and their loved ones. You can get more information from the sources below.

A free concussion recovery guide can be found at https://www.rimrehab.org/docs/librariesproviderdmcim/default-document-library/tbi-recovery-guide-full-document-ada.pdf?sfvrsn=ad02e63e_0.

The Brain Injury Association of America can be contacted at 1-800-444-6443 or www.biausa.org. The Brain Injury Alliance can also be contacted at <https://usbia.org/>.



Authorship

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Disclaimer: This information is not meant to replace the advice of a medical professional. You should consult your health care provider regarding specific medical concerns or treatment. The contents of this factsheet were developed under a grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR grant number 90DP0082). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of this factsheet do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, or HHS, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

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