

CONCUSSION OR MILD BRAIN INJURY (mTBI)

Questions & Answers



WHAT IS A CONCUSSION OR mTBI ?

A concussion or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) occurs when the brain is violently shaken. Concussions can occur from a variety of causes and at any age:

- Car accidents when the injury happens due to a head impact, whiplash, or the force of an airbag
- Accidents at work due to a fall from heights or head trauma
- Accidents in a playground such as falling from a slide or swing
- Sports injuries to the head or neck
- Falls from heights, stairs, or losing balance causing a trauma to the head, face, or neck in elderly
- Violent events during which the head is shaken or when the person is too close to a blast or explosion

How do I know whether I have injured my brain?

Symptoms of mild TBI typically include:

- Persistent headache
- Blurred vision
- Feeling tired or dizzy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty with memory
- Moodiness, short temper or irritability
- Intolerance of noise
- Reduced interest in sexual activity

Important facts...

- It is estimated that about 80-90% of all TBI's are mild
- Most patients with symptoms of mild TBI recover fully
- Specific treatment is rarely needed
- CT scans and MRIs are often normal in mild TBI
- Skull X-rays are rarely required

When should I go to hospital?

Minor symptoms are very common in the first 24 hours after head injuries. These are usually resolved without treatment. If symptoms persist for longer than 24 hours, you may have suffered mild TBI.

Report immediately to the emergency department if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- Repeated vomiting
- Headache that gets worse and does not go away
- Loss of consciousness or unable to stay awake during times you would normally be awake
- Getting more confused, restless, or agitated
- Convulsions or seizures
- Difficulty walking or difficulty with balance
- Weakness or numbness
- Difficulty with your vision

Tips to help your recovery

- Limiting activities is very important, especially in the first 7-10 days. This includes physical, sport, recreational, school and work until it is safe to return to these activities. A period of rest speeds up the healing process and helps symptoms clear up fast.
- Limit activities requiring attention and concentration such as schoolwork, videogames, text messaging and computer games
- Use an ice pack on the head or neck for comfort
- Rest when necessary but do not spend all day in bed
- Take over the counter pain medication if necessary. If this does not control your headache you should see your doctor
- Continue taking your regular medications
- Report your head injury to your employer or school
- Do not undertake strenuous activities, especially contact sports. Many sporting bodies will not allow you to take part in sport until you have been free of symptoms for a specified length of time
- Do not consume alcohol
- Do not drive a car until your concentration is good enough for you to do so, and you have been cleared to drive by your doctor
- Seek medical help if your symptoms worsen

What can I do to speed up recovery from a concussion?

Mood and behavior changes are more often seen in people experiencing mild TBI. The physical disability may not be very obvious. The most important factor in recovery involves support to help you understand your symptoms. You may need to adapt your lifestyle a little bit to allow you to recover fully. Keep cognitive tasks to a minimum (e.g. working at a computer, watching television, using a cell phone, reading, playing video games, text messaging). For less severe cases, rest breaks during school can help with recovery. Staying at home when you are experiencing worsening symptoms is preferred until symptoms improve.

How can I avoid a concussion in the future?

There are many ways to minimize the risk of a concussion and other injuries:

Wear a seat belt and use a safety seat for children

When biking, skiing, horseback riding and playing contact sports, make sure to wear a helmet that properly fits

When can I return to work, school and recreational activities?

Do not return to sports and recreational activities or work before talking to your health care professional. Discuss a "gradual return to work" (reduced work hours and lighter duties) with your Health team and employer. A repeat concussion especially when it happens before the brain has fully healed from the original injury can be very dangerous and may slow your recovery or increase the chance for long-term disability.



Do I need rehabilitation?

Most people with symptoms following head injuries recover without specific treatment. Further assessment and treatment is not usually required unless symptoms last for more than four to six weeks or a return to work or school program is to be discussed.

If your symptoms are bothersome, affect your school or work, and do persist longer you should see your family doctor and be referred to a trained professional. A typical concussion management program starts with an assessment of your symptoms and brain function. This base line assessment MAY include a computerized neurocognitive test such as ImPACT. A concussion management program typically includes:

Controlling Dizziness and Improving Balance: Dizziness symptoms and difficulty with vision and balance following a concussion are not uncommon. A qualified vestibular physiotherapist helps to reduce or eliminate dizziness, vision problems or balance problems after a concussion. This will be achieved by teaching specific exercises to not only reduce dizziness and fear of movement but improve confidence.

Restoring Strength and Endurance: Muscle weakness and general deconditioning can quickly set in after a concussion. A decrease in physical endurance affects energy level, sleep and recovery time. Your physiotherapist helps you to regain your strength and endurance with a safe and effective exercise program both in clinic and at home. In later stages of your rehabilitation, the therapist designs exercise drills suitable for the physical demand of your job or based on sports activities. The ultimate goal is to return you to an active lifestyle without making your concussion symptoms worse.

Returning to Normal Activity or Sport: A full return to activities of normal life requires that you engage in exercises with no or very little aggravation of your symptoms. A trained physiotherapist will integrate activities to stimulate and challenge your nervous system and brain without overloading it. A safe and quick return to normal life is a collaborative effort between the patient and the healthcare team.

We are here to help...

Physiomobility's concussion/ mTBI program is directed by Gita Mikal, a trained Shift Concussion provider. In addition, Gita has post-graduate advanced training in vestibular rehabilitation through Emory University & University of Southern California joint program and University of Pittsburgh enabling her to effectively manage complex mTBI conditions with a vestibular component.

We work closely with a vision therapist and will always be in contact with your referring physician and/or specialist to update them on your progress.



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