

# SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

## Following Concussion/Mild Traumatic Brain Injury

Traumatic Brain Injury Center of Excellence



U.S. Army photo by  
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### DEFINITION:

A traumatic brain injury (or TBI) is a blow or jolt to the head that disrupts the normal function of the brain. The severity of the TBI is determined at the time of the injury and may be classified as: mild, moderate, severe or penetrating.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- Concussion is another word for a mild TBI and is the most common type of TBI in the military population—more than 80 percent of all concussions in the military are considered mild.
- Concussion results from a head injury that makes you feel dazed, confused and may cause you to briefly lose consciousness. However, most concussions do not cause unconsciousness.
- Common causes of concussions in the military include falls, motor vehicle crashes, being struck by an object, assault, sports, guns or explosive devices; only about eight percent are battle injuries.
- Symptoms of concussion can be physical (body), cognitive (thinking) or emotional; these symptoms often resolve within days or weeks.

## Common Symptoms of Concussion

### Cognitive (Thinking)

- Confusion
- Difficulty finding words
- Difficulty making decisions
- Memory loss
- Poor concentration
- Slowed thinking

### Emotional

- Anxiety
- Feeling depressed
- Irritability
- Mood swings

### Physical

- Balance problems
- Dizziness
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Nausea and vomiting
- Ringing in ears
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Visual disturbances (blurred or double vision)

## HERE ARE SOME OF THE PROBLEMS IT COULD CAUSE:

- The brain controls many functions, such as memory, concentration, and coordination, which can affect how you perform on the job. This can impact unit readiness and create problems in your personal life.
- Those who have had a concussion and return to duty, sports or other activities prior to being medically cleared are at increased risk for another TBI. Some common symptoms following a concussion, such as dizziness, balance problems and fatigue could cause re-injury.

All TBIs are different—both in severity and in the specific symptoms each person experiences. Symptoms can be present immediately after the injury, but can also slowly emerge within the first 24–48 hours. Most mild TBI symptoms resolve within the first 30 days of injury. Less frequently, symptoms can extend past 30 days.

## AFTER CONCUSSION:

- Get prompt medical treatment—it is important for recovery.
- Know what you can do for yourself, such as getting sufficient rest, which will help you recover.
- Avoid activities that make you prone to another head injury. When you have or have had a concussion, you are more susceptible to getting another. This can make your symptoms worse and may lengthen your recovery time.



U.S. Marine Corps photo by  
Cpl. Christopher O'Quin

*Remember, recovery is different for every person and depends on the nature of the injury.*

## RECOVERY:

Remember that all TBIs are different both in severity and in the specific symptoms each person experiences. Symptoms may be present immediately after the injury, but they can also slowly emerge within the first 24 to 48 hours. Most symptoms of a mild TBI resolve within the first 30 days of injury. Less frequently, symptoms can last for more than 30 days.

Follow these RECOVERY TIPS:

- Sit out of contact sports until medically cleared to return to duty and sports activities
- Get enough sleep—seven to eight hours a night
- Take medications as instructed
- Avoid overexerting yourself physically or mentally
- Stay engaged with your family and medical provider; be honest about your symptoms
- Decrease or avoid drinking alcohol
- Decrease or avoid caffeinated drinks, i.e. coffee, soda, tea and energy drinks; these can disrupt your recovery process
- Write things down to help your memory
- Store important items like keys in a designated place to keep from misplacing them
- Avoid fatigue by pacing yourself and taking breaks as needed
- Focus on one thing at a time to improve your concentration
- Allow time for your brain to heal; it's the most important thing you can do.