BRAIN INJURY ASSOCIATION OF NORTH CAROLINA

How Mental Health & Concussion Collide

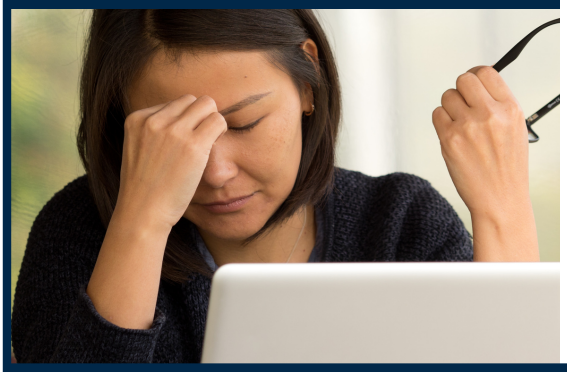
A **concussion is a mild Traumatic Brain Injury** (mTBI), often varying in severity and not seen on brain scans in the emergency department (ED).

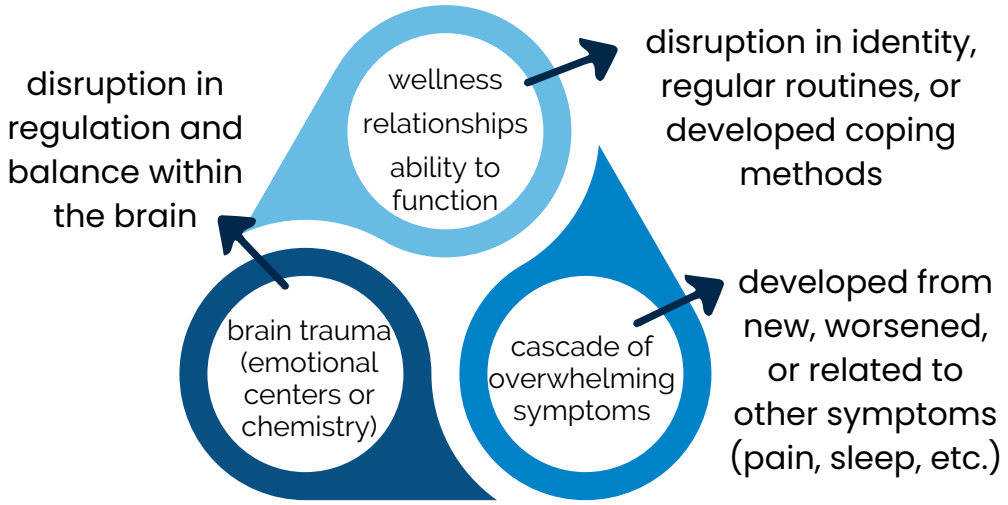
Effects are temporary (90% recover in less than three months) **or long-lasting** (10-15% do not recover after 6 months).

Injury can be **caused by sudden movement or a blow to the head** affecting brain function.

Symptoms include **problems with headaches, sight or hearing sensitivity, & concentration**.

Why are mental health experiences common after a concussion?





Everybody's concussion & mental health experiences are different

- **Irritability**: feeling easily frustrated or upset, agitated, impatient
- **Anxiety**: feelings of worry or fear that can be generalized or specific to a situation
- **Mood swings**: sudden, intense shifts in mood, or moods that seem out of place (for no reason or unexpectedly)
- **Depression**: feelings of sadness, hopelessness, emptiness, or a loss of interest or pleasure in normal activities

More supports and follow up are needed

to **address mental health** and not just physical symptoms after concussion. **People who experience mental health challenges before injury** show worse outcomes, including a longer lasting symptoms and extended recovery time.

Suicidal ideation is more common after Concussion

Concussion can disrupt the thinking process and add mental health symptoms leading to suicidal ideation. **Prevention and awareness are needed** to address thinking about, considering, or planning to take a life. **Having suicidal thoughts is 7 times more common** in those with post-concussion syndrome (PCS).

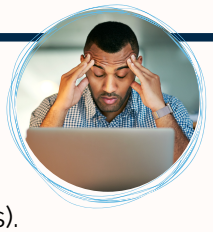
Mental Health & Concussion

Treatment Recovery, and Considerations (TRACE)

1 Talk to a healthcare provider

- can assess the types of symptoms, severity, and any other related health conditions.
- may refer you to a specialist including diagnostics, medications, or counseling supports.
- listen to your body - don't be afraid to seek another opinion with continued symptoms or normal scans.

2 Reduce mental health risk factors



- stress, isolation, loss of identity, uncertainty (about how to resolve symptoms or find treatment) and compounded financial, legal, or insurance issues can prolong recovery.
- don't rush treatment, hide or minimize symptoms in order to return to activity (there are risks).
- take mental health concerns seriously and reduce stress with practicing deep breathing exercises, meditation/mindfulness, listening to or watching nature, progressive muscle relaxation (PMR), or yoga.

3 Adjust your diet & nutrition for recovery

- drink plenty of water and opt for brain boosting foods (i.e. berries, leafy greens, nuts, fish).
- alcohol, caffeine, and other drugs can worsen symptoms and affect mental health.

4 Create balance of activity and rest

- create a sleep routine, use an eye mask for added darkness, and aim for eight hours of sleep to avoid making pain, memory problems, and emotional issues worse.
- rest for 1-2 days following injury (limited activity, stimulation, and screen time) then slowly build up tolerance to normal activity (start with a few minutes more a day).
  - symptoms (such as headaches) could be a sign to stop, rest, and reduce (noise, lights, movement).
- with no worsening of symptoms, attempt some form of light movement or exercise daily (such as walking or scaling normal fitness), to promote the growth of nerve cells and stimulate neural recovery.

5 Educate yourself to advocate for your recovery

- expect absence of visible signs of change leading to others not being able to understand
  - reach out for support - visit, text, or call a friend, find a support group, invite someone trusted to stay with you, or call/text a crisis line if needed (#988).
- adjust how you do regular activity by identifying triggers and adapting activity or surroundings.
  - avoid busy/noisy locations, reduce screens (TV, phones), use noise-reducing headphones, eye masks, or hats, massage the head/face, listen to music with no words, and write information down or set up programmed alerts to help memory.

Brain Injury Association of North Carolina

For more information and support, Contact us: (919) 833-9634 www.bianc.net bianc@bianc.net