

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY & THE MILITARY



According to the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center (DVBIC), traumatic brain injury (TBI) is a significant health issue which affects service members and veterans of all branches during times of both peace and war. The high rate of TBI and blast-related concussion events directly impacts the health and safety of individual service members and subsequently the level of unit readiness and troop retention. The most common form of brain injury recorded in the military is of mild severity, meaning more difficult to detect initially despite potentially long-term effects.

WHAT IS A TBI?

- A TBI is a blow or jolt to the head that can happen directly or indirectly, disrupting the normal function of the brain.
- Even though not all blows to the head result in injury, some, including concussions, may knock you out or make you feel confused for a period of time.
- Despite the sometimes invisible nature of detecting a brain injury, the long-term changes that result can often impact relationships, employment, mental health, and more.

COMMON CAUSES



Blast exposure



Slips or falls



Recreation & sports



Motor vehicle collisions or rolls



Physical or training exercises



Gunshot wounds or fragments



Violence or fighting



Penetrating objects

POTENTIAL CHANGES

PHYSICAL

- Headaches or pain
- Sleep disturbance
- Dizziness
- Balance or coordination problems
- Seizures
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fatigue
- Visual change
- Sensitivity
- Ringing in ears

THINKING

- Gaps in memory
- Trouble concentrating or attention
- Slowed thinking
- Difficulty finding words
- Trouble with initiation, motivation, or decision-making

FEELINGS

- Irritability
- Mood swings
- Anxiety or exaggerated worry
- Depression or sad mood
- Lack of interest
- Difficulty controlling emotion or actions



RECOVERY, REHABILITATION, & STRATEGIES AFTER INJURY

Recovery for each person after a TBI/concussion is different. Most people (around 90%) recover from a concussion within days or weeks, while others live with long-term effects. It is important to be honest about your symptoms with your medical provider to not put yourself at risk for further injury or even fatal consequences. If symptoms worsen, see a medical provider. As challenging as it may be, be patient & give the brain time to heal.

WARNING SIGNS

- Worsening headaches
- Worsening balance or coordination
- Double vision or other vision changes
- One pupil larger than the other
- Decreased level of alertness, drowsiness, or inability to wake up
- Increased forgetfulness, disorientation or confusion
- Repeated vomiting or nausea
- Seizures or convulsions
- Slurred speech
- Unusual behavior, restlessness, or agitation

RECOVERY TIPS

- Consult with a medical professional.
- Drink plenty of water & eat a healthy diet.
- Rest within 48 hours of injury.
- When starting activity, avoid over-exerting or continuing when experiencing symptoms.
- Get plenty of sleep, rest, and take breaks.
- Avoid caffeine and "energy enhancing" products.
- Avoid smoking, drinking alcohol, or over-the-counter medications unless prescribed.
- Avoid contact sports or other situations that might lead to an additional concussion.

TIPS FOR COPING

- **Write things down** - carry a planner, small pad and pen for memory.
- **Keep things organized**, stored in the same place, and even color-coded or labeled.
- **Take breaks as needed**, avoid over-exerting, & plan your day out to get the most important things done first to help with energy.
- **Avoid or remove distractions** to help with focusing and prevent overstimulation.
- **Try relaxation**, medication, breathing, or walking to help with worry, anger, or sadness.
- **Connect** with others & resources.

RESOURCES

- Brainline: www.brainline.org
- Centers for Disease Control (CDC): www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury
- NC Serves: americaserves.org/where-we-are/southeast/north-carolina
- Defense & Veterans Brain Injury Center (DVBIC): dvbic.dcoe.mil
- Operation We Are Here: www.operationwearehere.com/TBI
- Neuro Community Care: neurocc.com
- Department of Military Affairs: www.milvets.nc.gov/