

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CONCUSSIONS/MILD TBI

Traumatic Brain Injury Center of Excellence



PATIENTS

U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Francisco V. Govea I

WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion, also known as a mild traumatic brain injury (TBI), is a head injury resulting from a hit, blast, blow or jolt to the head that **may**:

- Make you feel dazed or confused
- Affect your ability to remember what happened
- Briefly cause you to lose consciousness

WHAT ARE COMMON SYMPTOMS OF CONCUSSION?

All concussions are different—both in the type and severity of symptoms each person experiences. Symptoms can start immediately after the injury, but may also slowly happen within the first 24–48 hours.

Thinking/Remembering

- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty remembering new information
- Difficulty thinking clearly
- Feeling slowed down

Emotional/Mood

- Irritability
- More emotional
- Nervousness or anxiety
- Sadness

Physical

- Balance problems
- Dizziness
- Feeling tired, having no energy
- Fuzzy or blurry vision, difficulty reading
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Sensitivity to noise or light

Sleep

- Excessive daytime sleepiness
- Sleeping less than usual
- Sleeping more than usual
- Trouble falling or staying asleep

AFTER CONCUSSION DIAGNOSIS, WHEN SHOULD I FOLLOW UP WITH MY PRIMARY CARE MANAGER (PCM)?

It is important to follow-up with your PCM on the next clinic day, but no later than 72 hours. If this follow-up appointment has not been made for you, use your normal appointment scheduling procedures to do so.

WHEN SHOULD I SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION?

- Worsening headache
- Slurred speech or difficulty speaking
- Unsteadiness on feet
- Seizures
- Double or blurred vision
- Weakness or numbness in any part of the body
- Decreasing levels of alertness
- Disorientation (not knowing where you are, difficulty recognizing people or places)
- Any unusual behavior (for example: increased aggression, anger, irritability or crying)
- Repeated vomiting
- Something 'just isn't right'

HOW IS MY PCM GOING TO MANAGE MY CONCUSSION?

Your PCM will treat your concussion using a Progressive Return to Activity (PRA) protocol. Following a gradual return to duty protocol has been shown to get service members back to full duty safely and reduce long-term complications. Your provider will discuss details of this protocol during your follow-up visit.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP THE RECOVERY PROCESS AFTER A CONCUSSION?

The symptoms of concussion resolve faster when your brain gets rest, so it is important that you slowly return to gentle activity. Here are some things you should and shouldn't do during the **early stages** of recovery:

Things You *Should* Do

- Light physical activities that don't make symptoms worse (e.g. walking at an easy pace)
- Light leisure activities that don't make symptoms worse (e.g. TV, reading)
- Take breaks if needed
- Get plenty of sleep, and take naps as needed in the early stages
- Eat a healthy diet and drink plenty of water
- Communicate with friends and family members for support
- Maintain or reduce use of caffeine, energy drinks, and nicotine
- If you're having headaches, use acetaminophen every 6 hours as needed

Things You *Should Not* Do

- Do not go to work (SIQ/Quarters)
- No physical training or exercise
- No driving until dizziness or visual symptoms have resolved
- No alcohol
- No combatives or contact sports
- No weapons fire or blast exposure
- Do not go outside the wire in a combat zone
- Do not use NSAIDs (e.g., Ibuprofen, naproxen, etc.) during the first 48 hours after injury

HOW DOES CONCUSSION AFFECT MY RETURN TO DUTY?

- It will take some time before you can return to duty. Symptoms after a concussion, such as slower reaction time, decreased energy, difficulty multitasking and concentrating, can affect your performance, placing you and the safety of your unit at risk.
- If you return to duty, sports or other activities before your brain recovers, you may make your symptoms worse and lengthen your recovery time. You will also increase your risk for suffering another concussion. This is because the common symptoms following a concussion, such as dizziness, balance problems and fatigue, make it more difficult to return to activities safely.
- Following a PRA protocol from your PCM may help your symptoms resolve sooner so that you can return to full duty safely.

WHEN CAN I RETURN TO DUTY?

Recovery is different for each person, but most people are back to full duty in 2–4 weeks. Your PCM will let you know when it is safe to return to full duty.

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Do you have questions about this fact sheet? Feedback? Email dha.TBICoEinfo@health.mil.