

Persistent Post-Concussion Symptoms



Mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI), also known as concussion, is a type of head injury that can result from a hit, bump or jolt to the head or body that causes the brain to move within the skull.

mTBI can result from a number of different causes, but most commonly occur through falls, sporting, motor vehicle or workplace accidents.

Most people who experience a mTBI will make a full recovery. The signs and symptoms of mTBI usually go away within a few days or weeks.

People who continue to experience mTBI symptoms longer than typically expected may be suffering from a condition known as Persistent Post-Concussion Symptoms (PPCS).

Sometimes people do not realise that they are experiencing PPCS until they go back to their normal daily activities, such as returning to work, study or sport. Tiredness can make symptoms worse.

You will need to return to your normal activities gradually (not all at once) in the first few weeks after your injury.

Consider the following to help yourself get better:



Sleeping

Talk to your doctor if you notice changes to your normal sleeping patterns that do not go away.



Driving

Do not drive or operate machinery until you feel better and are able to concentrate. Talk to your doctor for advice.



Drinking/drugs

Do not drink alcohol or use recreational drugs until you have fully recovered. These can make your symptoms worse. Talk to your doctor about other medications that you may be taking.



Work/study

You may need to take time off work or study until your concentration improves. Most people need a few days leave from work, and are back to full time work in less than two weeks. How much time you need to take from work or study will depend on the type of work you do. See your doctor and let your employer or teachers know if your symptoms are causing you problems at work or with study. You may need to return to work or study gradually and/or make adjustments to how you work or complete assignments.



Sports/lifestyle

Returning to sports and physical activity before your brain has healed can be dangerous and make your symptoms worse. Talk to your doctor about the steps you need to take to gradually increase physical activity and then return to play. **If in doubt, sit it out.**



Relationships

Sometimes your symptoms may affect your relationships with family and friends. You may experience irritability and/or mood swings. See your doctor if you or your family are concerned.

Recovery

Most adults typically feel 'back to normal' within 2-4 weeks following their mTBI. See your doctor if you're not feeling better. Your doctor will monitor your symptoms, and may refer you to one of a range of health care specialists if you do not improve.

Healthcare Professionals who may assist mTBI recovery

A range of healthcare professionals may be able to assist you in your recovery from a mTBI. Which healthcare professional you see will largely depend on the symptoms you are experiencing.

Some healthcare professionals will require you to get a referral from your GP/doctor first, while others can be contacted directly.



Examples of healthcare professionals that could be helpful to see after a mTBI include:

Symptoms

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Neck pain or stiffness
- Balance problems

Physiotherapist

Physiotherapists are health professionals that treat injuries and help manage health conditions that affect a person's ability to move. There are several types of physiotherapists, which may be seen for different reasons following mTBI. For example, a Musculoskeletal Physiotherapist may be seen to treat a sore or stiff neck, headaches, and other pain or mobility issues. A Vestibular Physiotherapist may be seen to help treat or manage dizziness, balance problems/instability, vertigo, and/or visual disturbance (e.g. gaze instability).

Symptoms

- Difficulties with activities of daily living

Occupational Therapist

Occupational Therapists (OTs) are health professionals that specialise in rehabilitation. OTs work closely with individuals, and at times their families, to identify how a person's injury or illness affects their daily life. OTs find ways to help individuals achieve their highest level of ability and independence following their injury or illness. Following mTBI, an OT may be seen to identify and teach memory strategies (e.g. checklists) to assist with changes in physical, perceptual and cognitive abilities (memory and thinking skills), and recommend ways to adapt home and work environments.

Symptoms

- Difficulties with memory and concentration

Neuropsychologist

Clinical Neuropsychologists are psychologists that specialise in the assessment and treatment of behavioural, emotional, and cognitive problems. A neuropsychologist can be seen for advice on how to build upon a person's existing skills and abilities and reduce any difficulties they may be experiencing following their mTBI.

Symptoms

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Relationship problems

Clinical Psychologist

Clinical Psychologists are health professionals trained in the assessment, diagnosis and management of mental illnesses and psychological (behavioural) disorders.

Symptoms

- Insomnia
- Tiredness or fatigue
- Trouble staying asleep

Sleep Specialist

Sleep Specialists are health professionals that specialise in the diagnosis and treatment of sleep related issues. They may be a medical doctor, psychologist or a scientist that has completed specialised training.

To learn more about these and other healthcare professionals, and how they might be able to help you recover from your injury, go to the Connectivity website www.connectivity.org.au/living-with-tbi/tbi-rehab-support-team

More information

Connectivity Traumatic Brain Injury Australia is an Australian-wide not-for-profit organisation working to raise awareness of concussion and traumatic brain injury (TBI) in the community. For more information on mTBI and Persistent Post-Concussion Symptoms, you can ask your doctor, healthcare professional or visit Connectivity at www.connectivity.org.au