

Mild traumatic brain injury



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.

When mTBI occurs, there is a rapid, short-term change in brain function.

This happens because of damage to nerve cells and blood vessels. In some cases, mTBI may also result in changes or damage to the ocular (eye) and vestibular (balance) systems.

The exact type and extent of damage can differ from person to person, and may result in different lived experiences of mTBI. The body repairs most damage quickly, but some may take a little longer, which may contribute to ongoing symptoms following injury.

Signs and symptoms

People who have experienced a mTBI may report a number of different signs (things that can be observed) and symptoms (things that are felt or experienced).

The signs and symptoms of mTBI generally occur immediately after the injury, but some may take hours or days to develop.

The signs and symptoms of mTBI can be physical, or may relate to thinking/remembering skills (cognition), emotional wellbeing and sleep.



Common mTBI signs and symptoms include:

Signs

- Appears confused or dazed
- Is confused about events
- Answers questions slowly
- Repeats questions
- Can't recall events prior to mTBI
- Can't recall events after mTBI
- Loss of consciousness (does not always occur)
- Shows behaviour or personality changes
- Forgetful

Physical symptoms

- Headache/"Pressure in head"
- Neck pain
- Dizziness
- Balance problems
- Nausea or vomiting
- Changes in vision
- Light and/or noise sensitivity
- Feel tired, have little or no energy

Emotion

- Easily annoyed or frustrated
- More emotional or sad
- Nervousness or anxiety
- Mood swings

Thinking/remembering

- Reduced concentration or attention
- Forgetful or memory problems
- Difficulty making decisions
- Slower processing of information
- Difficulty thinking clearly or feeling vague
- Communication and/or speech difficulties

Sleep

- Sleeping more than usual
- Sleeping less than usual
- Trouble falling asleep
- Difficulty staying asleep



It is important to remember that each mTBI is unique. That is, different people may experience different signs and symptoms after their injury, even if they have had a mTBI before.

Warning signs

If you or the person you are looking after show one or more of the following signs or symptoms after a mTBI, or they get worse, seek medical attention immediately as this may indicate a more severe injury.

- Fainting or drowsiness, or can't wake up
- Repeated vomiting
- Blurred vision or slurred speech
- Numbness or weakness
- Convulsions or seizures
- Continual fluid or bleeding from ear or nose
- Increased confusion, agitation or restlessness
- Constant headache or headache that gets worse
- Changes in behaviour – such as acting strange or saying things that do not make sense
- Clumsiness, or inability to move parts of body as usual



Go to your doctor, nearest hospital, or telephone an ambulance.

The first 24–48 hours after injury

Make sure to follow all advice given to you by your doctor.



Warning signs

You should be observed by a responsible adult for the first 24-48 hours. Seek medical attention immediately if you develop any of the warning signs.



Driving

Do not drive for at least 24 hours. You should not drive until all your symptoms have resolved, or you have been cleared by a medical professional to return to driving and/or operating machinery.



Cognitive activity

You may find it helpful to avoid engaging in stimulating tasks that require lots of thinking, concentrating, reading and/or listening in the first 24-48 hours following your injury. Speak to your doctor if you need to take time off from work or study.



Drinking/drugs

Do not drink alcohol or take sleeping pills or recreational drugs for the first 48 hours. All of these can make your symptoms worse. They can also make it difficult for other people to tell whether your injury is affecting you or not.



Pain relief

Use *Paracetamol* or *Paracetamol/Codeine* for headaches. Do not use Aspirin or other anti-inflammatory pain medications such as Ibuprofen or Naproxen (NSAIDs), which may increase the risk of complications. Check with your doctor about taking other prescription medications. Codeine should only be used if approved by a medical doctor as it may cause sedation.



Sport and physical activity

Do not play sports or engage in strenuous physical activity for at least 24 hours. These may worsen your symptoms, and put you at risk of further injury.

Recovery

Following mTBI, most adults typically feel 'back to normal' within about 2–4 weeks. See your doctor if you are not feeling better. Your doctor will monitor your symptoms and may refer you to one of a range of specialists if you do not improve.

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