Intermountain® Healthcare

Mild Traumatic Brain Injury (MTBI)

What is a mild traumatic brain injury?

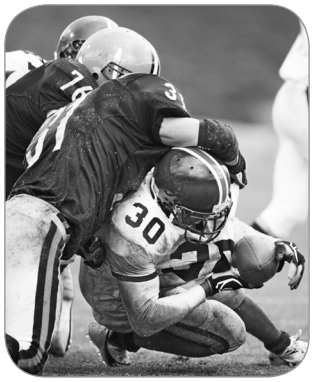
Mild traumatic brain injury (MTBI) is also commonly called a **concussion.** MTBI is a mild injury to the brain caused by a trauma to the head, such as a blow or fall. It often occurs in motor vehicle accidents, falls, or sports-related injuries. You don't need to lose consciousness to have an MTBI, and imaging studies of the brain (CT scan or MRI) often look normal after an MTBI.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of MTBI can appear right after an injury, or they can appear later. You may not notice problems from MTBI until you return to school, work, and your daily life. For most patients, symptoms resolve within a few weeks or months. Common symptoms include:

- **Physical symptoms:**
  - Headaches (very common)
  - Dizziness
  - Ringing in your ears
  - Mild to moderate nausea and/or vomiting
  - Difficulty sleeping or increased fatigue (tiredness)
- **Mental function:**
  - Difficulty driving
  - Difficulty completing tasks that were easy before your injury
  - Difficulty making decisions or solving problems
  - Shorter attention span
  - Increased forgetfulness
- **Emotions:** Mood swings and difficulty with emotions

Do not take any aspirin or anti-inflammatory medications, such as naproxen or ibuprofen (brand-name Aleve or Advil), until your symptoms have resolved. (These medications can increase the risk of bleeding in the brain.) For pain relief, take acetaminophen (Tylenol) instead. **Call your primary healthcare provider if any symptoms last longer than 14 days.**



Mild traumatic brain injury (MTBI) is also called a concussion.

MTBI is a mild brain injury caused by a blow to the head.

Symptoms usually clear up within a few weeks, but may last longer.

Warning signs — when to get help

Someone needs to stay with you to watch for warning signs for at least 24 hours after you leave the hospital. Call 911 or go directly to the nearest emergency department if you have any of the symptoms below:

- **Physical symptoms:**
  - Excessive sleepiness (people can't wake you up)
  - Lack of coordination or balance
  - Blurry or double vision
  - Pupils that are not the same size (left eye larger than right, or vice versa)
  - Sudden, severe nausea and vomiting
  - Sudden stiff neck or sudden, severe headache
  - Inability to control bladder or bowel function
  - Weakness, numbness, tingling, or paralysis on one side of the body
  - Bleeding or draining of fluid from nose or ears
- **Mental function:**
  - Decreased level of consciousness
  - Seizure
  - Garbled speech
  - Confusion

Your family or friends may notice some of these signs before you do. If they see any of these warning signs, they should seek emergency treatment.

How is MTBI treated?

There is no specific treatment for MTBI, other than rest, time, and guarding against repeated injury. Follow these guidelines:

- **Do not take aspirin, or anti-inflammatory pain relievers** (such as ibuprofen, naproxen, Aleve, or Advil) while you have MTBI symptoms.
- **If you are taking prescription pain pills for other injuries, talk with your doctor.** Some prescription pain pills can make it harder to notice warning signs and get help in time.
- **Avoid strenuous physical activities until your doctor says it's okay.** These include any activities that require a helmet or that could result in falling or injury.

When can I return to full activities?

Returning to full activity varies from person to person. **Before you return to vigorous activities, wait until your primary care provider or the Trauma Service says it's okay.** Make a follow-up appointment with your primary care provider, or keep your appointment with the Trauma Service if you have one.

Where can I learn more?

You can learn more about head injuries on the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website: **www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury**

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