

Concussion or Mild Traumatic Brain Injury

What is a concussion?

A **concussion** — or **mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI)** — happens when a sudden jolt or blow to the head disturbs the way your brain works. This can make you feel confused, disoriented, or dazed. It may also cause you to lose consciousness or to have some memory loss. You don't have to be knocked out to have a concussion.

How long do concussion symptoms last?

It is normal to feel symptoms for several days or weeks. Early on, symptoms may get worse before they improve. While every concussion is different, most concussions get better within a few weeks.

Physical signs and symptoms include:

- Headache, fatigue (extreme tiredness)
- Dizziness
- Mild-to-moderate nausea or vomiting
- Vision changes, sensitivity to noise and light
- Changes in sleep patterns, including
 - Drowsiness
 - Increased sleepiness
 - Difficulty falling or staying asleep

Mental and emotional signs and symptoms include:

- Feeling mentally foggy
- Shorter attention span, memory problems
- Slowed thinking, difficulty reading
- Increased irritability or sadness
- Feeling emotionally sensitive or anxious

When should I get emergency care?

Get emergency care if you or the person you are caring for has:

- Repeated vomiting
- Worsening, severe headache
- Seizures
- Excessive drowsiness or loss of consciousness
- Confusion or strange behavior
- Slurred speech
- Double vision
- Weakness, numbness, or tingling in arms or legs
- Behavior that is increasingly agitated or combative
- Bleeding or draining fluid from the nose or ears

How do I manage my symptoms?

As you start to feel better, you can slowly add some light exercise for short periods of time, like 10 to 15 minutes. If your symptoms don't get worse, you can gradually do more.

If you have pain in your neck or shoulders, talk to your doctor about physical therapy or try some gentle stretches and massage.

You might feel dizzy for a while after a concussion, but it should get better over time. If you feel really dizzy, tell your doctor. They might be able to help you feel better with medical or physical therapy treatments.

It takes time for your thinking and emotions to get better, too. If you are not feeling better or have concerns, talk to your doctor. They can help you find treatments that might help.

Continued on page 2.

Eat well.

A well-balanced, healthy diet is helpful during recovery from a brain injury. Be sure to:

- Drink plenty of water
- Avoid alcohol
- Avoid caffeine in the evening as it may affect your sleep

If you have any questions about health supplements, please talk to your doctor.

Take the right medicine.

- If your concussion causes a headache, you can take medicine like acetaminophen (Tylenol, others) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, others) if these medicines are safe for you. Call your healthcare provider if you are not sure.
- Do not take medicine for every headache you have, just the more severe ones. Taking medicine too often can make your headaches worse.
- If possible, do not take opioid pain medicines because they can make your concussion worse and slow your recovery. Ask your healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns.

What can I do to speed up recovery?

To speed your recovery:

- Do some light physical activity if it does not worsen your symptoms.
- Limit activities such as school, work, and screen time to a level that does not worsen symptoms. (See “When can I return to school or work”)
- Get good sleep. It is common to feel tired and have low energy levels after a concussion. Getting the appropriate amount of sleep is critical to helping your brain recover.
 - Aim for 8 hours of sleep nightly.
 - Take short naps during the day if you feel tired. Limit naps to less than 1 hour so they don’t interfere with night-time sleep, which is the best sleep for your brain.

What follow-up do I need?

You do not need any follow-up if you are getting better after the first week. However, you should see your regular doctor if your symptoms are **not** getting better after the first week and are still interfering with daily activities.

- Consider therapy if your symptoms do not continue to improve.
- You may ask for a referral to a concussion clinic. Ask your care team for a copy of the Concussion Clinical Resources to find a location nearest you.



What should I avoid?

To help you brain heal, it is important to avoid activities that could hurt your head again.

- Do not do anything that could make your symptoms worse. If you are not sure if it is safe to drive, talk to your doctor first.
- Avoid playing sports or doing other risky activities (like skiing) until your doctor says it is okay. If you hurt your head before you fully recover, your second injury could be more serious and take longer to heal.

When can I return to school or work?

Slowly return to school or work activities. These activities can often make symptoms worse. Gradually follow these steps and be sure to take several rest breaks throughout the day:

- 1 Increase reading, texting, and screen time 5 to 15 minutes at a time.
- 2 Gradually increase time spent doing homework or work activities outside of the work setting. Use a quiet room, and only work on shorter assignments.
- 3 Return to school or work part-time. Only attend certain classes, limit the number of tests you take, and do less homework than normal.
- 4 Return to school or work full-time.

Strategies to boost natural brain recovery

Sleep well



- Get most of your sleep at night
- After the first few days, limit naps to the middle of your day.
- Do not recline or lay down for long periods during the day.

Exercise



Exercise can help restore blood flow to the brain and reduce symptoms.

- Start slow with low impact aerobic exercises that don't trigger symptoms.
- Slowly increase duration and intensity.

Eat well



- Get most of your calories from vegetables, fruits, beans, nuts, legumes, and whole grains
- Avoid highly-processed foods
- Drink lots of water

Relax and have fun



Practice slow breathing for 20 minutes each day to help your body relax and activate healing processes.

- Do some fun activities to reassure your body that it is safe to focus on healing.

Pace yourself



- Include a mix of easy and moderately challenging activities in your day.
- Stop and take a break from activities that make your symptoms worse (slight increases may be okay).

Treat your whole person



Work with your doctor to manage other medical conditions during your recovery.

- Focus on treating neck injuries, pain, insomnia, anxiety, and depression as it plays a crucial role in concussion recovery.

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