

# TBI Basics

## → What is a TBI?

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- A traumatic brain injury (TBI) can be classified as mild, moderate, severe or penetrating. The severity is determined at the time of injury.
- A TBI is a blow or jolt to the head that disrupts the normal function of the brain. It may knock you out briefly or for an extended period of time, or make you feel confused or “see stars” (alteration of consciousness).
- Not all blows or jolts to the head result in a TBI.
- The most common form of TBI in the military is mild. Concussion is another word for a mild TBI.

## → What are the causes?

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In the military, the leading causes of TBI both deployed and non-deployed are (in no particular order):

- Blasts
- Bullets
- Fragments
- Falls
- Motor vehicle – crashes and rollovers
- Sports
- Assaults

In the deployed setting, blasts are the leading cause of TBI.

## → What are common signs and symptoms of TBI?

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### ▶ Physical

- [Headache](#)
- [Sleep](#) disturbance
- [Dizziness](#)

- Balance problems
- Nausea/vomiting
- Fatigue
- Visual disturbances
- Sensitivity to light
- Ringing in the ears

▶ **Cognitive**

- Concentration problems
- Temporary gaps in [memory](#)
- Attention problems
- Slowed thinking
- Difficulty finding words

▶ **Emotional**

- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Mood swings

➔ **How long does recovery take?**

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- Recovery is different for every person.
- Most people recover from a concussion.
- Symptoms usually begin to improve within hours and typically resolve completely within days to weeks.
- Even after more than one concussion, full recovery is expected; however, every time an additional concussion is sustained, healing time might take longer.

## ➔ **What helps recovery from a concussion?**

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- Be honest about symptoms with your medical provider.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Rest during the day — don't overexert — mentally or physically.
- Get plenty of sleep at night.
- Avoid smoking or drinking alcohol.
- Avoid over-the-counter medications unless prescribed by a provider.
- Take prescribed medications as directed by a provider.
- Avoid caffeine and “energy-enhancing” products.
- Take precautions to avoid another concussion: Avoid contact sports, combatives, etc.
- Stay engaged with family members and medical provider.
- If symptoms persist or worsen, see a medical provider.
- Be patient. Give the brain time to heal.

## ➔ **Warning signs**

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- Worsening headaches
- Worsening balance
- Double vision or other vision changes
- Decreased level of alertness
- Increased disorientation
- Repeated vomiting
- Seizures
- Unusual behavior
- Amnesia/memory problems

### **→ What are some coping tips?**

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- Write things down; carry a small pad and pen.
- Store important items, such as your keys or your wallet, in the same designated place to keep from losing them.
- Keep a steady pace. Take breaks as needed.
- Focus on one thing at a time.
- Perform tasks in a quiet, non-distracting environment.
- If feeling irritable or angry, try relaxation techniques and/or walking away from the situation.

### **→ Think about the obvious:**

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- Are you irritable or having trouble concentrating? Are you getting enough sleep?
- Are you having trouble sleeping? Are you drinking energy drinks or alcohol?

NOTE: This information is not intended as a substitute for advice from a medical provider. Consult a medical provider if you may have suffered a concussion. Be honest about the injury event, symptoms and any self-medicating you may be doing or have done.