



A patient guide to mild traumatic brain injury

What is a mild traumatic brain injury (MTBI)?

A traumatic brain injury can occur for many reasons for example; following a fall, an assault, sports injury or a road traffic accident. An injury to the brain can occur even when there is no direct blow to the head.

MTBI, also known as concussion, can occur without loss of consciousness or physical signs of a head injury. In most cases of MTBI a head injury does not always lead to any form of brain injury.

- MTBI is caused by rapid acceleration and deceleration of the brain as it moves within the skull either from blunt force or sudden change of direction
- This can cause bruising and a temporary disruption to the functioning of the brain. As a consequence the brain may not work as efficiently for a while
- Around 50% of people that have a MTBI experience some symptoms; however you should not be concerned as this is perfectly normal

The severity of a brain injury is measured in the following ways;

- Duration of loss of consciousness
- Degree of confusion or memory loss
- Ability to respond

Recovery after a mild traumatic brain injury

Studies have shown that 85% of patients report a full recovery one week after a MTBI, rising to 97% of patients after a month.

The actual length of time can vary and can be longer depending on the person's age and health prior to injury. Generally most people make a good recovery.

Around 88% of people in the UK who have an MTBI will go back into full time work after 3 months.

Around 3–5% of people who have suffered an MTBI may go on to experience ongoing problems. This includes difficulties with;

- Attention and concentration
- Memory for day-to-day events
- Problems with planning and organising tasks
- Holding things in their mind for periods of time

Typically people find thinking things through or following information more difficult and can be slower. These symptoms are likely to resolve on their own and any disruption to brain functioning is usually not permanent.

Symptoms are more likely to show up when you are overworked, tired, under pressure or worried about the consequence of your injury.

Common symptoms after a MTBI

- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Sensitivity to light
- Sensitivity to noise
- Sleep disturbance
- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Confusion
- Restlessness
- Impulsivity and self control problems
- Feeling depressed, tearful or anxious
- Difficulties with concentration
- Memory problems
- Difficulties thinking, planning and problem solving

If any of the above symptoms persist 4–6 weeks after your MTBI, you should contact your GP as further specialist help is available.

Your GP will be able to refer you to the Mild Traumatic Brain Injury (MTBI) Clinic at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham for a follow up assessment with a team of specialists to assess your needs.

If you experience any of the following symptoms you require immediate medical attention and must go to your local A&E department;

- Loss of consciousness
- Drowsiness when you would normally be awake
- Unable to be woken from sleep
- New deafness in one or both ears
- Clear fluid coming out of nose or ears or at the back of your throat accompanied by a salty taste
- Bleeding from one or both ears
- Any weakness in one or both arms or legs
- Loss of balance or problems walking
- Constant vomiting
- Increasing disorientation
- Problems speaking or understanding what others are saying
- Persistent blurred or double vision
- Severe headaches that still persist after taking pain killers
- If you experience fits (collapsing, passing out suddenly, epileptic seizures)

MTBI recovery do's

- It is important to try and gradually resume your normal daily routine after discharge. If however, your symptoms begin to get worse it may be because you are doing too much.
- It is important to pace yourself in the short term and match your level of activity with your level of ability and energy levels.
- Make sure you get plenty of sleep during the night; you may need more sleep than usual as your body begins to recover.

Information for Patients

- Resting during the day is important as it may help reduce headaches
- However, you should not sleep for long periods during the day to ensure you sleep at night. You should maintain a healthy diet and ensure you eat plenty of fruit and vegetables, and drink plenty of water as it is important to stay well hydrated.
- It is important not to worry and to remember that these symptoms are common and very likely to resolve on their own

MTBI recovery don'ts

- You should not be alone at home in the first 48hrs after being discharged from hospital
- It is recommended you do not play contact sports until all symptoms have settled down and for at least 3 months after being discharged – playing sport can increase chances of sustaining another concussion
- You should not take recreational drugs or drink alcohol as this can slow the rate of recovery
- Do not stay in bed for long periods of time – it is important to aid recovery by stimulating the brain
- It is important that you do not go back until you have made a full recovery; post–concussional symptoms can worsen under stressful conditions. Also you may make mistakes which can endanger your job
- Do not drive before you feel fully recovered and have been cleared by your GP; your balance, judgment and speed of thinking may be affected
- Do not consume large amounts of food/drink containing lots of sugar including energy drinks as this can worsen your symptoms

Contact number

Head Injury Clinical Nurse Specialist: **0121 371 4243**

Please use the space below to write down any questions you may have and bring this with you to your next appointment.

Information for Patients

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If you require this information in another format, such as a different language, large print, braille or audio version please ask a member of staff or email patientexperience@uhb.nhs.uk.