

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CONCUSSIONS/MILD TBI

Traumatic Brain Injury Center of Excellence



U.S. Air Force photo by  
Tech. Sgt. Francisco V. Gowea II

## WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion, also known as a mild traumatic brain injury (TBI), is a head injury resulting from a hit, blow or jolt to the head that **may**:

- Make you feel dazed or confused
- Affect your ability to remember what happened
- Briefly cause you to lose consciousness

## Common Symptoms of Concussion

### Cognitive (Thinking)

- Confusion
- Difficulty finding words
- Difficulty making decisions
- Memory loss
- Poor concentration
- Slowed thinking

### Emotional

- Anxiety
- Feeling depressed
- Irritability
- Mood swings

### Physical

- Balance problems
- Dizziness
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Nausea and vomiting
- Ringing in ears
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Sleep disturbances
- Visual disturbances (blurred or double vision)

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Concussion is the most common type of TBI in the military—it accounts for over 80 percent of all TBIs.
- The majority of concussions within the military occur while in garrison. Common causes include falls, motor vehicle crashes, being struck by objects, assaults, sports, guns or explosive devices.
- Concussions can result from of a sudden increase or decrease in speed, even if the head doesn't strike anything.
- All concussions are different—both in the particularity and severity of symptoms each person experiences. Symptoms can start immediately after the injury, but can also slowly happen within the first 24–48 hours.
- Most people fully recover from a concussion. Each person's recovery is different, but symptoms typically improve within hours and resolve completely in a few days to a couple of weeks. Less frequently, symptoms can continue for more than 30 days.

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MHS

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## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAD A CONCUSSION?

**Get immediate medical attention:** It is important you visit your primary health care provider for an evaluation. If you experience any of the following worrisome symptoms, go to your local emergency department:

- Worsening headache
- Slurred speech or difficulty speaking
- Unsteadiness on feet
- Seizures
- Double or blurred vision
- Weakness or numbness in any part of the body
- Decreasing levels of alertness
- Disorientation (not knowing where you are, difficulty recognizing people or places)
- Any unusual behavior (for example: increased aggression, anger, irritability or crying)
- Repeated vomiting
- Something 'just isn't right'

## WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP THE RECOVERY PROCESS AFTER A CONCUSSION?

The symptoms of concussion resolve faster when your brain gets rest, so it is important that you slowly return to gentle activity. Here are some things you should and shouldn't do during the **early stages** of concussion:

### Things You *Should* Do

- Light physical activities that don't make symptoms worse (e.g. walking at an easy pace)
- Light leisure activities that don't make symptoms worse (e.g. TV, reading)
- Take breaks if needed
- Get plenty of sleep, and take naps as needed in the early stages
- Eat a healthy diet and drink plenty of water
- Communicate with friends and family members for support
- Maintain or reduce use of caffeine, energy drinks, and nicotine

### Things You *Shouldn't* Do

- Do not go to work (SIQ/Quarters)
- No physical training or exercise
- No driving until dizziness or visual symptoms have resolved
- No alcohol
- No combatives or contact sports
- No weapons fire or blast exposure
- Do not go outside the wire in a combat zone

## HOW DOES CONCUSSION AFFECT MY RETURN TO DUTY?

- It will take some time before you can return to duty. Symptoms after a concussion, such as slower reaction time, decreased energy, difficulty multitasking and concentrating, can affect your performance, placing you and the safety of your unit at risk.
- If you return to duty, sports or other activities before your brain recovers, you may make your symptoms worse and lengthen your recovery time. You will also increase your risk for suffering another concussion. This is because the common symptoms following a concussion, such as dizziness, balance problems and fatigue, make it more difficult to return to activities safely.
- Following a progressive return to activity guidance from your primary health care provider may help your symptoms resolve sooner so that you can return to full duty safely.

## WHEN CAN I RETURN TO DUTY?

Recovery is different for each person, but most people are back to full duty in 2–4 weeks. Your primary health care provider will let you know when it is safe to return to full duty.