

What is Traumatic Brain Injury?

A traumatic brain injury (TBI) is caused by a blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the normal function of the brain. Not all blows or jolts to the head result in a TBI. The severity of a TBI may range from “mild,” i.e., a brief change in mental status or consciousness to “severe,” i.e., an extended period of unconsciousness or amnesia after the injury.

Traumatic Brain Injury Symptoms

[Traumatic brain injury](#) victims and their families face devastating emotional and physical challenges. Overlooked traumatic brain injury symptoms compound these challenges. Traumatic brain injury symptoms can be subtle and go undiagnosed and untreated. Over time, untreated brain injury can lead to further brain damage, disability, or even death.

Mild Traumatic Brain Injury Symptoms (Concussion)

Mild traumatic brain injury ([concussion](#)) symptoms are especially subtle and varied. Victims may lose consciousness for only a few seconds / minutes, or may not lose consciousness at all. In fact, a mild brain injury victim may be temporarily dazed or remain completely awake.

Common mild traumatic brain injury symptoms include dizziness, temporary loss of consciousness (less than 30 minutes), temporary memory loss, blurred vision, bad taste in the mouth, and confusion or daze. Mild traumatic brain injury symptoms may not be immediately apparent. Since the brain swelling that causes many of these symptoms is often gradual, days or weeks can pass before symptoms appear. Depression, agitation, insomnia, migraines, inattentiveness, or memory loss can surface and reflect more serious, long-term brain damage.

Key Mild Traumatic Brain Injury Symptoms (Concussion)

Immediate Mild Traumatic Brain Injury Symptoms:

- Confusion
- Headache
- Temporary memory loss
- Loss of consciousness (less than 30 minutes)
- Ringing in the ears (tinnitus)
- Drowsiness
- Nausea
- Dilated pupils
- Slurred speech

Delayed or Secondary Mild Traumatic Brain Injury Symptoms:

- Mood swings
- Inability to concentrate
- Headaches or migraines
- Depression
- Insomnia
- Fatigue
- Memory problems
- Sensitivity to lights and sounds
- Change in sense of smell or taste
- Trouble with balance

Moderate to Severe Traumatic Brain Injury Symptoms

Moderate to severe traumatic brain injury symptoms are more pronounced. Moderate to severe traumatic brain injury symptoms include headache that worsens or does not go away, loss of consciousness (more than 30 minutes), vomiting or nausea, loss of bowel control, slurred speech, memory loss, convulsions or seizures, dilation of one or more pupils, and paralysis or numbness in the limbs.

Bleeding in the head, or intracranial bleeding, is also common. Bleeding in the head is measured with magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), computed tomography scan (CT scan), or intracranial pressure monitor (ICP). Bleeding in the skull or brain is serious. Even when treated, intracranial bleeding can lead to long-term complications or death. Moderate to severe brain injury victims often lose consciousness, and some do not regain consciousness. Coma is a serious complication of traumatic brain injury. Coma is not a death sentence, however. Brain injury victims can remain unconscious for days or even weeks before responding to stimuli. Doctors classify comas using the Glasgow Coma Scale (GCS) or the Rancho Los Amigos Coma Scale. These tests help to determine the severity of a coma and if the patient will regain consciousness.

Key Moderate & Severe Traumatic Brain Injury Symptoms

Immediate Moderate & Severe Traumatic Brain Injury Symptoms:

- Loss of consciousness (more than 30 minutes)
- Dilated pupils
- Blurred vision or vision loss
- Dizziness
- Slow pulse
- Slow breathing
- Vomiting
- Drowsiness
- Headache or migraine
- Confusion
- Ringing in the ears or hearing loss

Delayed or Secondary Moderate to Severe Traumatic Brain Injury Symptoms:

- Inability to think clearly
- Amnesia
- Spinal fluid (watery liquid) coming out of the ears or nose (severe brain injury)
- Paralysis (severe brain injury)
- Emotional problems (irritability, depression)
- Slurred speech
- Inability to speak or form words
- Numbness in limbs (severe brain injury)
- Loss of bowel control (severe brain injury)
- Coma (severe brain injury)
- Epilepsy or seizures (severe brain injury)

It can be difficult to recognize symptoms of mild (concussion), moderate, or severe traumatic brain injury. Subtle symptoms can conceal serious brain damage, so immediate medical care is crucial to diagnose, treat, and cope with traumatic brain injury. Please read other articles on this site to learn more about the causes, complications, and treatments for traumatic brain injury.