

# CONCUSSION/MILD TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY AND POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

## Following Concussion/Mild Traumatic Brain Injury

Traumatic Brain Injury Center of Excellence

### WHAT IS A TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY (TBI)?

- A TBI is the disruption of normal brain function caused by an external force including a jolt or blow to the head.
- Not all blows or jolts to the head cause a TBI.
- A TBI may be classified as mild, moderate or severe. A mild TBI, also called a concussion, is the most common form.
- You may or may not lose consciousness, remember the event (amnesia), feel confused or “see stars” immediately after the injury.



### WHAT IS POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)?

PTSD describes a group of symptoms that may develop after you are exposed to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence.

These events can include combat exposure; domestic violence; sexual, mental or physical abuse; a motor vehicle crash; a terrorist attack; or a natural disaster.

### IS THERE A CONNECTION BETWEEN CONCUSSION AND PTSD? CAN I HAVE BOTH?

- Yes. Concussion and PTSD involve physical changes and psychological symptoms.
- Yes, you can have both. Concussion and PTSD can be caused by the same traumatic event.
- Some people with a concussion may also have PTSD, but not everyone does.
- The symptoms of PTSD and concussion may be similar and make it hard to tell which condition you have. Common symptoms for each are listed below.

#### Possible Symptoms of TBI

- Headaches
- Dizziness or balance problems
- Nausea
- Sensitivity to light and sound
- Vision changes
- Impulsivity

#### Overlapping Symptoms

- Fatigue
- Sleep problems
- Trouble with memory and attention
- Feeling depressed
- Feeling anxious
- Irritability

#### Possible Symptoms of Psychological Trauma

- On high alert
- Startled easily
- Fearfulness
- Flashbacks
- Nightmares
- Guilty feelings
- Avoidance
- Numbness
- Self-destructive behavior

## WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CONCUSSION AND PTSD?

- If you experience a head injury, get evaluated by your health care provider as soon as possible.
- If you have symptoms of PTSD after a traumatic event, see your health care provider to talk about treatment options.
- Most cases of concussion improve with rest.
- Most cases of PTSD respond well to treatment. Common treatment options may include counseling and medications. Some complementary or alternative medicine approaches such as meditation have also shown to be useful, as a second line treatment, for managing symptoms of PTSD.
- Avoid using drugs, drinking alcohol or energy drinks. These can disrupt your recovery process.
- Ask your family if they have noticed anything different about you lately. They may be aware of changes that you can't see for yourself.



### *Did you know?*

*You may have symptoms, such as anxiety or avoidance, without having a diagnosis of PTSD. Connect with your provider; you can get help for your symptoms whether or not you have a PTSD diagnosis.*

## WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE RECOVERY PROCESS?

- Recovery is personal—each person gets better at his or her own pace.
- If you've had a concussion, talk with your health care provider about activities to avoid and which ones can help you recover.
- Support your recovery by taking care of yourself. Keep a regular sleep schedule, eat healthy foods and stay active.
- You may not feel like yourself while you recover and may not be able to pinpoint why.
- As you recover, some symptoms may go away faster than others. Make sure you tell your provider about these changes.

## WHAT DO MY FAMILY OR FRIENDS NEED TO KNOW?

- Your family members or friends may not understand how you are feeling or how best they can help. They can help by:
  - learning about your symptoms and what to look for
  - learning what to expect as you recover
  - being supportive
  - joining support groups so they get the assistance they need
- Help your family and friends understand your recovery process by explaining that:
  - you may not feel or act like yourself
  - some days may be better than others
  - responsibilities of each family member may change
  - you may have trouble completing daily activities the way you used to



## WHAT SHOULD I DISCUSS WITH MY HEALTH CARE PROVIDER?

- Ask for information about what you can expect on your road to recovery.
- Talk about treatment options and develop a plan.
- Request advice on nutrition, exercise, relaxation tips and better sleep habits.