

Caring for a Person with a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)



A traumatic brain injury (TBI) is an injury to the brain caused by a blow or shock. A TBI changes the way the brain works. The common causes of a TBI are falls, violence (including self-inflicted injury), auto accidents, and sports injuries. If you have a family member or friend with a TBI, it is important to learn as much as you can about the condition to take an active role in caregiving.

What you might expect

TBI is classified as mild, moderate, or severe. This is based on how severe the injury was when it happened. But every injury and every brain is different. That means it's hard to predict the types of symptoms a person will have and how long the symptoms will last. For instance, a person might have a mild TBI but still have serious symptoms for a long time.

A TBI can change the way a person acts, moves, thinks, and feels. Changes may include:

- **Physical symptoms.** These can include vision problems, dizziness, headache, clumsiness, tiredness, and trouble sleeping.
- **Thinking problems.** These can include loss of memory, poor judgment, confusion, and being unable to pay attention.
- **Emotional problems.** These can include mood swings, anger, depression, and anxiety.

Most people with a TBI do recover. But it may take days, weeks, months, or years. Older people and those who have had more than one TBI recover more slowly. If a person had a severe TBI, some symptoms may last for many years or even for life. But there are good treatments available. The treatment will likely include these:

- Physical rehabilitation
- Mental health counseling
- Education
- Healthy lifestyle changes, such as diet and exercise
- Social support services
- Medicines, if needed

How you can help

Studies show that people whose caregivers include family members recover more quickly. The best way you can help is by taking an active role. Support your family member or friend during recovery. Here are some caregiving tips:

- Help them get organized by using lists and daily planners.
- Encourage them to concentrate on just one task at a time. Help provide an environment free of distractions when focus is needed.
- Expect them to have a certain amount of fatigue. You may find it is better to plan activities for early in the day.
- Try to limit their activities if they're trying to do too much.
- Help them keep a regular schedule for eating, sleeping, and exercising.

- Go with them to healthcare provider and rehabilitation visits. People with a TBI may have trouble with memory and attention. You can help by writing down questions and taking notes.
- Don't be afraid to offer your opinions and observations. You may know the person best.
- Help them avoid alcohol and drugs. It may be tempting to use these substances to relieve symptoms, but they will only make symptoms worse.
- Help by exercising and sticking to a healthy diet along with them.
- Don't get discouraged. Remember that your family member or friend will get better.

Caring for yourself

Keep in mind that caregiving is a tough and stressful job. Make sure to take time for yourself. Ignoring your own health is not good for you or your family member or friend with TBI. If you are struggling physically, talk with your healthcare provider. If you are struggling emotionally, ask about counseling. Many caregivers benefit from joining a caregiver support group. You don't have to do this by yourself.

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