

Living well after a traumatic brain injury



Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is an injury to your brain that may change the way you feel, act, move, and think. A TBI can be caused by accidents, injuries, violence (including self-inflicted injury), or falls. If you've been diagnosed with a TBI, recovery may continue for a long time after you leave the hospital.

A TBI can change your life. Symptoms may include slowed thinking, headaches, clumsiness, memory loss, and mood swings. Learning how to deal with these symptoms can be hard. It can even make you feel depressed and angry. But the good news is that most TBI symptoms do and will improve with time. And even though some symptoms may last for years or even a lifetime, you can find ways to cope.

Recovery after a TBI

Everybody's brain heals differently after a TBI. How quickly you'll recover is unpredictable. It can be hard to be patient during recovery. You may look fine on the outside, but be struggling on the inside. You may have good days and bad days. The important thing to remember is that you'll get better. Staying active, spending time with friends and family, and trying to live as normal a life as possible is the best way to cope.

Tips for living well

Keep working with your healthcare providers. They can help you with your physical and mental recovery. Make sure to keep all your appointments and be honest about your symptoms. The recovery steps that you take on your own are also important. Many are good habits that can help you over your lifetime. Try to:

- **Take good care of yourself.** That means getting regular exercise, eating a healthy diet, and getting regular hours of sleep.
- **Have an active social life.** Let your friends and family become part of your recovery team. Take advantage of their help and emotional support. Consider joining a TBI support group to share your feelings and experiences with others who understand.
- **Find ways to reduce your stress.** TBI recovery is stressful. Start by figuring out what parts of your life are adding to your stress. Stay away from or change those things if you can. Try ways to reduce stress like deep breathing, exercising, getting a massage, learning to meditate, listening to music, or spending quality time with loved ones.
- **Don't push yourself.** Recovery is a slow process. Trying to do too much too soon makes your symptoms worse. Let your life move more slowly. Give yourself more time to do the things you need to do. Do them 1 at a time and ask for help if you need it.
- **Don't try to treat TBI symptoms or relieve stress with alcohol or drugs.** These substances may worsen TBI-related symptoms and slow down the healing process. Your brain may also be more sensitive to these substances. This can make you more likely to make bad decisions.

A TBI can change your life in ways that are hard to deal with. The biggest mistake is to give up and drift away from caregivers, friends, and loved ones. It takes some courage and willpower, but you need to stay active and involved. And you don't have to do this alone.

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