

Anxiety and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)



A traumatic brain injury (TBI) is a brain injury that can change the way you think, act, and feel. A TBI could be caused by a blow to your head, falls, fights, sports, and car accidents.

Anxiety is fear and worry. Dealing with a TBI is stressful. So it's not surprising that anxiety is a common symptom of a TBI. But sometimes fear and worry get so strong that they get in the way of your ability to live your life. When this happens, you may have an anxiety disorder.

Spotting an anxiety disorder with a TBI is important. An anxiety disorder can make it hard to do things you need to do to recover from a TBI. It may raise your risk for substance abuse and depression.

Symptoms of anxiety disorder

Like a TBI, an anxiety disorder can change the way you think, act, and feel. It can cause physical symptoms. In severe cases, it can cause a seizure. Here are some common symptoms to watch for:

- Extreme fear and worry that don't go away
- Shortness of breath
- Racing heartbeat
- Trouble sleeping
- Restlessness
- Trembling
- Feeling dizzy
- Upset stomach (nausea)
- Can't think clearly
- Panic attacks

Types of anxiety disorders

These are the types of anxiety disorders:

- **Generalized anxiety disorder.** This means you have symptoms of anxiety that get in the way of living daily life.
- **Panic disorder.** This causes fear that's more like terror. You may live in fear of having a panic attack. People with panic disorder may become afraid to leave the house.
- **Phobias.** These are intense fears of certain things or situations. You may fear an activity like flying. Or you may be afraid of public places.
- **Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).** This causes you to have thoughts and behaviors you feel you can't control. People with OCD repeat behaviors, like cleaning or washing, over and over.
- **Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).** This is when you relive a traumatic event in flashbacks and nightmares. About 1 in 4 people with a TBI have PTSD. This is common in veterans wounded during combat.

What to do for an anxiety disorder

Let your healthcare provider know about your anxiety symptoms. You're not alone. Your provider is aware of the risks of anxiety disorder and can help you. A mental health provider can treat an anxiety disorder with cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). This is a type of counseling.

With CBT, you learn the sources of anxiety and how to manage your symptoms. CBT teaches you to change the thoughts that lead to anxiety. It teaches you to deal with symptoms in healthy ways. Relaxation methods and deep-breathing exercises may be part of the treatment. Anti-anxiety medicines may be used along with CBT.

To help yourself cope with anxiety:

- Share your fears and worries with others.
- Stay active and spend time with friends and loved ones.
- Don't use alcohol or drugs to relieve anxiety.
- Don't smoke or drink too much coffee.
- Eat a healthy diet, get regular exercise, and keep regular hours for sleep.
- Reduce stress by taking part in activities you enjoy.

TBI symptoms get better with time. Everybody's brain heals at a different pace. Try to be patient. Give yourself the time you need. Don't let anxiety get in the way of your recovery. You don't need to suffer. Treatment is available for both anxiety and TBI.

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