

Adjustment disorder and traumatic brain injury



A traumatic brain injury (TBI) is an injury to your brain that can change the way you think, act, and feel. Falls, fights, sports, and car accidents are common causes of a TBI.

Having a TBI and getting better after a TBI are life-changing and stressful events. Some people develop a group of symptoms called adjustment disorder after a trauma such as a TBI.

Diagnosing adjustment disorder along with a TBI is important. Adjustment disorder may make it harder for you to take part in your TBI recovery program. It may also put you at a higher risk for drug and alcohol problems. If not treated, adjustment disorder may even lead to clinical depression and suicidal thoughts.

Symptoms of adjustment disorder

Adjustment disorder symptoms often start within 3 months of a traumatic event. The traumatic event could have caused your TBI. It could also be a divorce, death of a loved one, worries about money, or other major changes taking place in your life. Symptoms of adjustment disorder can be bad enough to affect your everyday life at home or at work. They may include:

- Sadness
- Worry
- Trouble sleeping
- Trouble focusing
- Being very tense and nervous
- Crying
- Trembling
- Heart beating too fast or too hard (palpitations)
- Making poor decisions

What to do for adjustment disorder

Many symptoms of adjustment disorder are similar to TBI symptoms. It's important to let your healthcare provider know about all your symptoms. They know about the dangers of adjustment disorder. They can connect you with a mental health provider who can help you.

Treatment for adjustment disorder is very effective. It may include a type of counseling called cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). CBT is a form of talk therapy. It teaches you to replace negative thinking and behaviors with healthier thoughts and behaviors. You may benefit from individual sessions or group therapy.

Talk therapy is the main treatment. But family therapy sessions and self-help support groups may also help. Joining a support group is a good way to share your feelings. You can also get support from others with similar problems. Medicines may be used for symptoms such as trouble sleeping or anxiety.

Some people need medicine to treat symptoms after TBI, such as depression. In most severe cases of depression after TBI, electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) can be used.

Adjusting to recovery

Having a TBI changes your life in many ways. Stick with your treatment and rehabilitation. Here are some steps you can take to make your adjustment easier:

- **Take good care of yourself.** Get regular exercise and eat a healthy diet. Get regular hours of sleep.
- **Have an active social life.** Let your friends and family become part of your recovery. Take advantage of their help and emotional support.
- **Find ways to reduce your stress.** Ideas include deep breathing, recreation, massage, meditation, music, and spending quality time with loved ones.
- **Be patient with your recovery.** Everybody's brain recovers at its own pace. Give yourself more time to do the things you need to do.
- **Don't treat your symptoms with alcohol or drugs.** These substances make symptoms worse. And they'll slow down the healing process.

Adjusting to life after TBI is hard. But it does get better. Remember that you're not alone. Work with your healthcare team and get support from friends and family. Let your healthcare provider know about any symptoms of adjustment disorder. Treatment is available and it works.

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