

Mild Traumatic Brain Injury Discharge Instructions

Important Points about Mild Brain Injury

- You had a mild brain injury or what is sometimes called a concussion. Most people recover quickly following a mild brain injury. A few people may experience symptoms over a longer period.
- There is a small risk of you developing serious complications so you should be watched closely by another adult for 24 hours after the accident.
- Please read the following. It outlines what signs to look for after a brain injury and what you need to do if you have problems.

The first 24-48 hours after Injury

- **Warning Signs: You should be observed and return to hospital if you develop any of the warning signs below:**

Warning Signs

If you show any of these symptoms or signs after your brain injury, or you get worse, go to the nearest hospital, doctor or call 911 immediately.

- Fainting or blacking out, drowsiness, or can't be woken up
- A constant severe headache or a headache that gets worse
- Vomiting or throwing up more than twice
- Cannot remember new events, recognize people or places (increased confusion)
- Acting strange, saying things that do not make sense (change in behaviour)
- Having a seizure (any jerking of the body or limbs)
- Inability to move parts of your body, weakness in arms or legs, or clumsiness
- Blurred vision or slurred speech
- Being unsteady on your feet or loss of balance
- Continual fluid or bleeding from the ear or nose

Recommendations for the first 24-48 hours after injury:

- **Rest/Sleeping:** Rest (both physical and mental) and avoid strenuous activity for at least 24 hours.
- **Driving:** Do not drive for at least 24 hours. You should not drive until you feel much better and can concentrate properly. Talk to your doctor.
- **Drinking/Drugs:** Do not drink alcohol or take sleeping pills or recreational drugs in the next 48 hours. All of these can make you feel worse. They also make it hard for other people to tell whether the injury is affecting you or not.
- **Pain Relief:** Use **acetaminophen** or **acetaminophen/codeine** for headaches. **Do not use aspirin or Anti-inflammatory pain relievers** such as ibuprofen or naproxen (NSAIDs), which may increase the risk of complications.
- **Sports:** Do not play sports for at least 24 hours.

See your local doctor if you are not starting to feel better within a few days of your injury.

The First 4 Weeks after Mild Traumatic Brain Injury

You may have some common effects from the brain injury which usually resolve in several weeks to three months. These are called **post-concussion symptoms**. Tiredness can exaggerate the symptoms.

Return to your normal activities gradually (not all at once) during the first weeks or months. **You can help yourself get better by:**

- **Rest/Sleeping:** Your brain needs time to recover. It is important to get adequate amounts of sleep as you may feel more tired than normal and you need to get adequate amounts of both physical and mental rest.
 - **Driving:** Do not drive or operate machinery until you feel much better and can concentrate properly.
 - **Drinking/Drugs:** Do not drink alcohol or use recreational drugs until you are fully recovered. They will make you feel much worse. Do not take medication unless advised by your doctor.
 - **Work/Study:** You may need to take time off work or study until you can concentrate better. Most people need a day or two off work but are back full time in less than 2 weeks. How much time you need off work or study will depend on the type of job you do. See your doctor and let your employer or teachers know if you are having problems at work or with study. You may need to return to study or work gradually.
 - **Sport/Lifestyle:** It is dangerous for the brain to be injured again if it has not recovered from the first injury. Therefore, refrain from any activity that puts you at risk for repeat injury. It is not safe to participate in contact sports until you have been informed it is safe to do so by a healthcare provider.
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- **Please participate in light exercise 30 minutes a day, at least 5 days a week to improve your recovery after resting for the first 48 hours following your injury.**
 - **What is light exercise? Examples of light exercise are walking or stationary cycling at a pace that does not cause you to sweat or breathe harder. It is easy to have a conversation at this intensity.**
 - ***If you are participating in exercise and experience severe symptoms, such as severe headache, dizziness, or generally feeling unwell, stop the activity and rest.***
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- **Relationships:** Sometimes your symptoms will affect your relationship with family and friends. You may suffer irritability and mood swings. See your doctor if you or your family are worried.

Recovery

- You should start to feel better within a few days and be 'back to normal' within about 4 weeks. See your local doctor if you are not starting to feel better.
- Your doctor will monitor these symptoms and may refer you to a specialist if you do not improve over 4 weeks up to 3 months.

This Brain Injury Advice Sheet is adapted from the Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation Guidelines for Mild Traumatic Brain Injury and Persistent Symptoms – 2nd Edition.