

What Do I Need to Know?



Some Facts

What is Traumatic Brain Injury?

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) may be caused by a blow, bump, jolt, or penetrating wound to the head. Injuries may be due to blasts in combat, or because of motor vehicle accidents, falls, falling or flying objects, or assaults. TBIs may be called “mild” and, be referred to as a concussion, when there is a brief change in awareness or consciousness at the time the injury occurs. It is called “moderate” or “severe” when there is a longer period of unconsciousness or amnesia, which means memory loss. The initial injury does not necessarily predict what long-term symptoms an individual may have.

Treatment may include

rehabilitation therapies, exercise or activities, medication, education, counseling, and support.

Physical and Mental Changes to Expect

There are some common physical, emotional, or cognitive (thinking) changes that can occur with TBI depending on the type and severity of the injury. Some symptoms may be present immediately, while others may appear later. The Veteran's symptoms and course of recovery may differ from others with a similar type of injury. One individual may recover with few remaining problems, while others experience symptoms that can last for days, weeks, or sometimes longer. In general, recovery from TBI is slower for older individuals, and for those who have had a previous brain injury. For individuals with a severe TBI, there may be lifelong changes or problems with physical, emotional, or cognitive functioning.

Physical changes may include problems with vision, light sensitivity, weakness, and coordination, as well as headaches, dizziness, fatigue, pain, and sleep disturbances.

Thinking changes may include memory and learning problems, decreased concentration, problems with judgment, and slower thinking.

Emotional issues may include irritability, problems managing anger or frustration, depression, anxiety, adjustment difficulties, and problems with social functioning.

What Does This Mean for Me?

Family Caregivers play an important role in recovery. In fact, many people who work with people with TBI, believe that having a Family Caregiver is one of the most important aids to recovery. You can offer support, encouragement, and guidance to your injured family member, and help ensure the treatment plan established by the medical professionals caring for the Veteran is followed.

At times, you may feel overwhelmed, angry, or scared. You may also feel alone, or feel worn out by caregiving responsibilities. These reactions are normal and typically come and go. If you feel like there is just too much to deal with, seek help either by confiding in a friend, participating in a support group, or consulting a professional mental health practitioner.



Caregiving Tips

1. It is often difficult for an individual with TBI to multitask, so give one instruction at a time. Try using lists and memory notebooks. A calendar is also a helpful tool to organize daily tasks.
2. Be sensitive to the issue of fatigue. If your family member seems tired or overwhelmed, suggest they take a break.
3. Establish a routine in which your family member pre-plans activities for the day. Scheduling the most important activities for the morning is a good idea, because energy levels tend to decline over the course of the day. Remember that your loved one will have good days and bad days, both emotionally and physically. This is a normal part of recovery.
4. Know what resources are available and reach out to friends, family, and professionals. VA can help you learn about available resources at www.caregiver.va.gov.
5. Attend visits to the medical provider with your family member and provide detailed information about the Veteran's progress and challenges. Ask questions and take notes.
6. Be supportive and patient, but also remember to take care of yourself. If you find yourself completely overwhelmed or you feel yourself "losing it," take a moment and call someone—a friend, a family member, or VA's Caregiver Support Line (1-855-260-3274). Support groups may also be available in your community or at your local VA.
7. Visit your doctor regularly, and get plenty of rest so you can stay strong. Remember, you are doing the best you can, and you are making a difference in your loved one's life.

More information on TBI and caregiving can be found at www.polytrauma.va.gov. An additional resource, *Traumatic Brain Injury: A Guide for Caregivers of Service Members and Veterans* can be found at <https://www.health.mil/Military-Health-Topics/Centers-of-Excellence/Traumatic-Brain-Injury-Center-of-Excellence/Patient-and-Family-Resources>.



I have more questions. Where can I go for help?

VA knows that being a caregiver can be both rewarding and hard. You can always find more information at www.caregiver.va.gov, including contact information for the VA Caregiver Support Program team nearest you.

You can also call VA's Caregiver Support Line
toll-free at 1-855-260-3274.

The Caregiver Support Line is open
Monday through Friday, 8:00 am – 10:00 pm ET,
and Saturday, 8:00 am – 5:00 pm ET.

Call to talk to caring professionals who can:

- Tell you about the assistance available from VA.
- Help you access services and benefits.
- Connect you with your local Caregiver Support Program Team at a VA Medical Center near you.
- Just listen if that's what you need right now.