

# WHEN CONCUSSION SYMPTOMS ARE NOT GOING AWAY

## A GUIDE FOR ADULTS WITH CONCUSSION



### HAVE YOU HAD A CONCUSSION?

If you have had a concussion, also called a mild brain injury, there are things you can do to feel better. Usually concussion symptoms will go away by three months. Most people feel better in two to four weeks. However, some people have symptoms that last longer than three months.

**Remember:** You don't have to hit your head to get a concussion. A hard bump to the body can also cause a concussion.

If you have an active lifestyle, three months may be too long to wait to see if symptoms go away. You need to act sooner to safely and successfully return to school, work and physical activity.

### FIRST THING AFTER INJURY

- Go to the doctor or hospital.
- Rest for the first one to three days as needed.
- Follow the doctor's care plan.
- Watch carefully for changes.
- Have someone else watch, too.

Get a doctor's letter saying that you have a concussion (or mild brain injury) and when you may return part-time or full-time to school or work.

### FIRST FEW DAYS TO WEEKS AFTER INJURY

After three days, start to ease back into daily routine, but try not to do too much. Too much activity can make symptoms last longer. **Did you know that research also shows that too much rest can do the same?** It is safest to find a balance. If you can, put off big work, legal or financial decisions during this time.

## TRY NOT TO PUSH THROUGH YOUR SYMPTOMS

### RETURNING TO COLLEGE (OR OTHER TRAINING AFTER HIGH SCHOOL)

Ease back into school. You may need to start with a shorter schedule. Leave class as symptoms get worse and before they become too bad.

Take a break when you need one.

Start by talking to each teacher. Show them the doctor's note. Tell them what happened. Let them know how you are feeling and what you think may help you or what you may need to do.

#### Examples of helpful changes:

- "I may need to wear sunglasses because I'm sensitive to light."
- "I may need to put my head down to rest. I'd like to do this rather than leave so I can still listen."
- "I can't handle a whole class yet, so I may need to leave early."
- "I may need extra time for this test/project because it takes longer for me to think and plan."



Let teachers know that you do not expect these changes to last long, but you do need them now in order to do your best. If you need help in making these changes, talk to the school's Disability Services office.

Tennessee's TBI Service Coordinators are people who can help you at no cost. They know about concussion (brain injury) and can help with what you need. **800-882-0611**

## RETURNING TO WORK

You may need to give your employer the letter from your doctor that tells why you were out and gives the okay to return.

If possible, work with your employer to return slowly (half day at first) to see if your symptoms get worse.

In some jobs, you can make changes without asking the employer.

Maybe you can turn off your private office light, turn down the brightness on your computer, or close the door? Make any changes that you know are okay to make on your own. Work with your employer to make other changes. Tell them that these changes may not last long. It may help to talk with your Human Resources office.



### FOUR TO SIX WEEKS AFTER INJURY

If your symptoms have not gone away by four weeks after injury, you may need to see a symptom specialist. **What is a symptom specialist?** New research shows that there are different types of symptom groups like having problems with thinking, headaches and balance. Treatment for your symptom group can help you feel better sooner. Talk to your doctor about sending you sooner if needed. **Talk about your injury and problems that have started with the specialist.**

*Below are some of the problems and who your doctor might send you to see:*

Problem	Referral (Specialist who can help)
Thinking (Cognitive) and Tiredness (Fatigue)	Neuropsychologist, specialized concussion clinic, brain trauma clinic, Speech Language Pathologist
Balance (Vestibular)	Physical Therapist, specialized concussion clinic
Problem with eye movement (Ocular-Motor)	Neuro-ophthalmologist, Occupational Therapist
Headache/Migraine	Neurologist
Neck pain (Cervical)*	Chiropractor, Physical Therapist
Changes in feelings, Sad, Angry (Mood, Anxiety)	Psychologist, Counselor, Neuropsychologist, Psychiatrist

*\*If the neck is out of place, it can cause headaches and other concussion symptoms.*

### ONGOING

Continue to use your helpful changes at work and school. If you start new classes and jobs, you may need to think of new changes for those. Look at a strategy list like the **Strategies and Accommodations Tool** at: <http://bit.ly/4ngy8GD> for ideas or talk to a specialist.

**Choose a key person in your life to help you with ideas for helpful changes while you heal.  
It is good to know and to ask for what you need.**



# DANGER SIGNS

If you see any of these signs, CALL 911  
or go to the hospital immediately



- 🧠 Nausea (very sick stomach) or vomiting
- 🧠 One pupil larger than the other
- 🧠 Headache that does not go away
- 🧠 Seizures: eyes fluttering, body going stiff or shaking, staring into space
- 🧠 Loss of consciousness, even brief
- 🧠 Disoriented/confused
- 🧠 Hands shake, body shaking, muscles get weak, loss of muscle tone

[https://www.cdc.gov/heads-up/?CDC\\_AAref\\_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/headsup/basics/concussion\\_danger\\_signs.html](https://www.cdc.gov/heads-up/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/headsup/basics/concussion_danger_signs.html)

## OLDER ADULTS

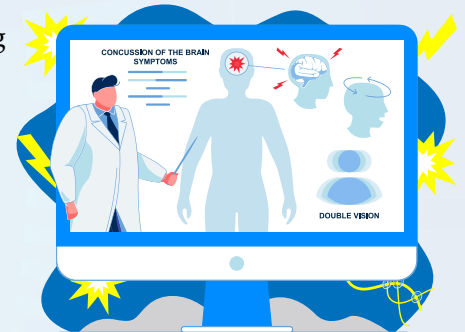
As we age, changes can take place in our brains. A fall or other accident is more likely to cause a concussion or even a brain bleed. A bleed may take more time to show up in someone who is older, so they need to be watched more closely over several days. **If any danger signs are seen (see box) - in anyone at any age - call 911 or go to the hospital right away.**

## WHAT'S GOING ON? IS THERE REALLY ANYTHING WRONG WITH ME?

Concussion symptoms can seem to come and go or get worse. Sometimes you may even doubt if there is a problem. When symptoms seem to change, it is usually because your body or your mind is tired. Symptoms can also change if you drink alcohol or take a drug (even legal medicine). Being sick, being upset, in pain, or stressed can also cause changes. The better you can manage these other things, the better your symptoms will be. Symptoms are real. They tell you that the brain is still healing and needs time.

**Take time to make helpful changes at home, school and work until you don't need them.**

- TN Statewide Crisis Phone Line: **855-CRISIS-1**
- See the **Personal Guide for Everyday Living after Concussion/Traumatic Brain Injury** at <https://www.tndisability.org/rehabilitation>



## BEHAVIOR CHANGES

Sometimes angry behavior, like yelling at others, is the first sign that you have had a brain injury. You may be mad or sad that you can't do something that was easy before the injury. Others may not understand.

Be patient with yourself. Try to figure out what the real problem is.

**Ask yourself these questions:** Can I pay attention? Has my vision changed? Am I in pain? Maybe you just can't handle things like you used to. Try to figure out if there are any helpful changes you can make. Talk with someone who can help you - a trusted friend, family member or a specialist.

## RETURNING TO SPORTS AND OTHER PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND PHYSICAL JOBS

**Student athletes, recreational athletes and people with physical jobs should be cleared by a medical professional before going back to their sport or to a job.**

- You should not return to sports (or a physical job) if you still have concussion symptoms.
- You should also not return when you are still taking medicine for pain or other concussion symptoms. See the National Collegiate Athletic Association guidelines:  
<https://www.ncaa.org/sport-science-institute/concussion>

# THINGS TO WATCH FOR OVER TIME

## Check all those that you see:

- ☐ Mood swings, getting mad easier, changes in how you act
- ☐ Trouble with staying on task and thinking
- ☐ Memory problems - things that just happened
- ☐ Anxiety, depression, or problem handling stress
- ☐ Headaches
- ☐ Behavior that doesn't fit the time, place or people (loud in a library)
- ☐ Poor sleep and feeling tired too easily
- ☐ Later: Problems with work at school or job



**EVERY BRAIN INJURY IS DIFFERENT.**  
**There is no set time that getting better takes.**

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

If your injury is the result of someone you know who is hurting you, ask for help.  
Tell the doctor. **Call 911** if it is an emergency.

Call the Tennessee Statewide Domestic Violence Helpline at **800-356-6767**.

**You can find help** at the Tennessee Coalition to End Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence: <https://www.tncoalition.org/>.

**For a child:** <https://www.tn.gov/dcs/program-areas/child-safety/reporting/child-abuse.html>  
or call 877-237-0004

**For an older person:** <https://www.tn.gov/aging/learn-about/elder-abuse.html> or call 888-277-8366

## ALCOHOL ABUSE

Many people feel that alcohol changes them more than it did before their injury. Thinking becomes harder and their emotions are more out of control. It is wise to avoid alcohol and drugs while you are getting better. Never drink or use drugs and drive.



## FREE RESOURCES

### Tennessee Traumatic Brain Injury Program:

<https://www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/fhw/tbi.html>

### Tennessee Traumatic Brain injury Service Coordinators:

<https://www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/fhw/tbi/support-groups.html>

### Tennessee Vocational Rehabilitation:

<https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/ds/vocational-rehabilitation.html>

### Supported Employment:

<https://www.tn.gov/behavioral-health/mental-health-services/ips-supported-employment.html>

### WorkAbleTN:

<https://www.tndisability.org/workabletn>

### Brainline:

<https://www.brainline.org/>

### Brain Injury Association of America:

<https://www.biausa.org/>



<https://www.tndisability.org/brain>

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