

Brain Injury and Aging Health

Traumatic Brain Injuries may be missed or misdiagnosed in older adults because symptoms of TBI overlap with other medical conditions that are common among older adults, such as dementia.

75+

Nationally, people aged 75 years and older have the highest numbers and rates of TBI-related hospitalizations.

1 in 50

Over 1 in 50 Americans aged 75 or older experience a TBI-related ED visit, hospitalization or death.

3 Million

Each year, there are about 3 million emergency department visits due to falls in older adults. More than half will not tell their doctor.
cdc.gov

BEST PRACTICE

People who work with older persons should:

- SCREEN for prior history of Brain Injury
- ASSESS Cognitive & Functional Impairment
- EDUCATE staff on Brain Injury
- EDUCATE the person about their Brain Injury
- PROVIDE and TEACH Accommodations
- CONNECT person with Community Resources

COMMON PROBLEMS

After Brain Injury, we often see problems with:

Attention, memory and new learning

Slowed speed of processing
Organization, problem solving & impulsivity
Irritability, frustration & agitation
Balance, dizziness & headaches
Poor awareness of deficits & difficulties
Difficulty being flexible, poor self-monitoring

For an older adult who already has changes in abilities, look for a worsening in any of those areas after a fall or other injury.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

People who work with older persons may see:

Looking uninterested because they cannot pay attention
Appearance of defiance because they cannot remember the rules
Slow to follow directions because they cannot process quickly
Being argumentative because of irritability, anger and impulsivity
Falling into things, often getting hurt
Difficulty re-entering community because of cognitive changes
Getting stuck on an idea or a way of doing something, does not recognize mistakes

STEADI is a fall prevention program of the CDC with user-friendly brochures to help identify and remove reasons for falling. cdc.gov/steady/.

Common Accommodations for Brain Injury Challenges

Here are some common and simple accommodations:

For the person:

Working for shorter periods of time
Getting rid of distractions around you, like noise or movement
Taking notes (on paper, in a notebook, on a phone or computer)
Using a phone to set timers to remember appointments

For the care provider:

Repeating information to the person
Slowing down when talking; giving them more time to respond
Giving the person a list of house rules, written directions, or pictures to help them understand and remember
Coaching the person with the injury to “Stop, think and plan” then act
Coaching the person to take deep breaths when feeling angry or anxious

Tools for Best Practice

Brain Injury Screening Resources:

NASHIA’s OBISSS: <https://www.nashia.org/obisssprogram> - The OBISSS is highly recommended. It is made up of the OSU screening tool, a Symptoms Questionnaire and Strategies. It can be used electronically, on a computer, phone or ipad. It can be self-administered.

OSU TBI Identification Method: <https://wexnermedical.osu.edu/neurological-institute/neuroscience-research-institute/research-centers/ohio-valley-center-for-brain-injury-prevention-and-rehabilitation/osu-tbi-id>

Brain Links’ Strategies & Accommodations Tool: <https://www.tndisability.org/rehabilitation>

Symptom Questionnaire and Cognitive Strategies:

Adult: bit.ly/3FLkz0V

Juvenile: bit.ly/4iS2bSC

Tennessee Resources

Brain Links’ Website with many resources: <https://www.tndisability.org/brain>

Brain Links’ Toolkits (for Service Professionals and Survivors):

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

TN Department of Health TBI Program:

<https://tinyurl.com/3v5jrdt3>

Tennessee Brighter Futures’ Resource Pages & Training for Brain Injury:

<https://www.tndisability.org/tbf-brain-injury>

Resource Pages & Training on Aging and Brain Injury:

<https://www.tndisability.org/tbf-social-determinants-health>

Tennessee Brighter Futures is organized and facilitated by Brain Links through a contract from the Tennessee Department of Health TBI Program.

References:

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<https://doi.org/10.1089/neu.2017.5371>

Peterson, AB; Thomas, KE. (2021). Incidence of Nonfatal Traumatic Brain Injury-Related Hospitalizations - United States, 2018. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*. Dec 3, 2021. 70(48);1664-1668.
Traumatic Brain Injury and Concussion, [cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury](https://www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury)

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