

# Brain Injury and Veterans



**Most Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBIs) among veterans are from explosions and combat. PTSD often occurs along with the TBI because of the traumatic event that caused it.**

**414,000**



The number of military members diagnosed with TBI from 2000 to late 2019 - most were mild. (Defense & Veterans Brain Injury Center) (Mild injury **does not** necessarily mean mild outcome.)

**Higher Rates**



Service members with TBIs have higher rates of PTSD, depressive disorder, substance use disorder, and anxiety disorder than those without TBI.



**84%**



Veterans with mTBI (mild) had greater combat exposure; less social support; and more comorbidities, including asthma, PTSD, sleeping problems, worse pain scores and slower processing speed.

## BEST PRACTICE

**People working with veterans should:**

- **SCREEN** for prior history of Brain Injury
- **ASSESS** Cognitive & Functional Impairment
- **EDUCATE** staff on Brain Injury
- **EDUCATE** the veteran about their Brain Injury
- **PROVIDE** and **TEACH** Accommodations
- **CONNECT** Veteran 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

*"Veterans who use VA health care must undergo mandatory TBI screening if they served in combat operations."  
U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs*

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

**People working with veterans 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
- Getting into fights because of irritability, anger and impulsivity
- Falling into things, often getting hurt
- Difficulty re-entering community because of cognitive changes
- Gets stuck on an idea or a way of doing something, does not recognize mistakes

**"Veterans are more likely to be civically engaged than non-veterans and, on average, veterans contribute more time in their communities than non-veterans." Nat'l Conference on Citizenship**

# Common Accommodations for Brain Injury Challenges

Here are some common and simple accommodations:

- Working for shorter periods of time
- Getting rid of distractions, 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
- 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/obissprogram> – 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](https://bit.ly/3FLkz0V)
- Juvenile: [bit.ly/4iS2bSC](https://bit.ly/4iS2bSC)



## Tennessee Resources

**Brain Links' Website** with many resources:  
[tndisability.org/brain](https://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 for Veterans Health**  
<https://www.tndisability.org/tbf-social-determinants-health>

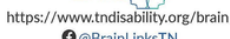
**TN Brighter Futures is organized and facilitated by Brain Links through a contract from the TN Department of Health TBI Program.**



**Veterans  
Health  
Resource  
Pages**

### References:

- Understanding military traumatic brain injury. (2025) DAV.org <https://www.dav.org/get-help-now/veteran-topics-resources/traumatic-brain-injury-tbi/>
- Greer N, Sayer NA, Spont M, Taylor BC, Ackland PE, MacDonald R, McKenzie L, Rosebush C, Wilt TJ. Prevalence and Severity of Psychiatric Disorders and Suicidal Behavior in Service Members and Veterans With and Without Traumatic Brain Injury: Systematic Review. J Head Trauma Rehabil. 2020 Jan/Feb;35(1):1-13. doi: 10.1097/HTR.0000000000000478. PMID: 31033741.



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