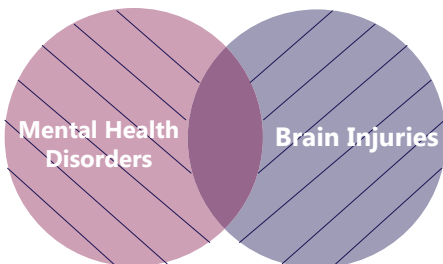


**QUICK  
GUIDE**

# Mental Health & Brain Injury

The relationship between brain injury and mental health is strong, but still under-researched. What we do know is while sometimes brain injury is an entirely separate issue to mental health, brain injury can lead to new mental health issues developing, and mental health issues can make brain injury symptoms worse. The effects of brain injury and mental illness can look very similar, which is why understanding the relationship between the two is important for individuals to advocate for themselves and for medical professionals to make accurate diagnoses.

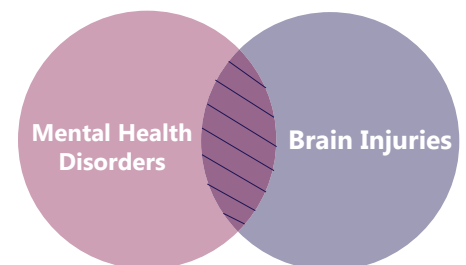
## What are the differences between mental health disorders and brain injuries?



While many symptoms of a brain injury overlap with those of a mental health disorder, not all mental health issues that develop after a brain injury are severe enough to be considered "disordered." However, this does not mean the mental health issues an individual experiences are not real, important, or cause challenges. Talking about mental and emotional struggles with medical professionals can help determine whether or not they are related to a brain injury.

## What are the similarities?

There are many symptoms caused by a brain injury that are also typical for different types of mental health disorders (see chart on next page). If a mental health issue or disorder is already present for an individual, a brain injury can also make those symptoms worse, creating more challenging problems. Tracking symptoms (like emotions and mental state) in a journal and trying to identify when they first started and compare that timeline to when the brain injury occurred can help the individual and medical professionals determine the root cause and best treatment options.



## How do substance abuse disorders impact brain injuries and vice versa?

Substance abuse and addiction to drugs and alcohol is considered a mental disorder, and can be intertwined with the effects of a brain injury. Being under the influence of substances that impair judgment, motor functions, and memory increases the likelihood of being injured. The symptoms of a brain injury also increase chances of developing a substance abuse disorder. In fact, individuals with a brain injury are 11 times more likely to die of an overdose than people without a brain injury<sup>1</sup>. This means substance abuse can be both a cause and a symptom of brain injury, making it especially important to be aware of.

**Overall, the symptoms\* of some mental health disorders and brain injuries overlap in many ways:**

	Concussion	Anxiety	Depression	Substance Abuse
Headaches	X	X	X	X
Drowsiness	X	X	X	X
Irritability	X	X	X	X
Poor memory	X	X	X	X
Fatigue	X	X	X	X
Poor sleep	X	X	X	X
Nausea	X	X	X	X
Dizziness	X			X
Blurred vision	X			X

\*For a comprehensive list of mental health disorder and brain injury symptoms, please consult with a medical professional.

## What does treatment and recovery look like?

There is no "cure" for brain injury or mental health disorders. However, there are many effective treatment options like cognitive-behavioral therapy and medication to help decrease symptoms and manage challenges. Be aware not all doctors who treat brain injury are mental health experts and vice versa, which is why being as honest as possible about your difficulties is key.

**The TN Traumatic Brain Injury Program** can help you better understand brain injury and consult with you about your personal situation. We can then direct you to services you might need in your area. Our services are confidential and free.

**To get in touch: 1-800-882-0611**

**Visit the TN TBI Program**

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

**Contact Brain Links** for "free" Training & Educational Information at: [tbi@tndisability.org](mailto:tbi@tndisability.org)

1. Administration for Community Living National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) "Opioids and TBI" Brief, April 2019.