

## Return to Learn for Head Injuries

### Head injuries may be referred to a Concussion or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). What are these?

A concussion or TBI is caused by an injury to the brain caused by a direct or indirect blow to the head, face or neck where the head and brain rapidly shift back and forth (sometimes called “whiplash”). They result in short term impairment or limitation of neurological function and various signs and symptoms ranging from mild to more severe.

### Are you protected from head injuries if a helmet is used?

No. Although helmets help, a person may still suffer a concussion while wearing one.

### How is a TBI diagnosed?

A person does not have to lose consciousness to be diagnosed with a concussion. In fact, many do not get “knocked out”. TBI’s are diagnosed based mainly on symptoms and the history of a consistent injury. Symptoms may develop immediately or may take 48 hours after the injury to develop. Concussions are NOT visible on a CT or MRI scan. Due to chemical changes that take place in the brain at the time of the injury, many are unable to participate in physical and mental activities.

### Signs and Symptoms of a TBI:

- Appears dazed/confused/forgetful (can’t recall events before or after the injury)
- Repeats and/or answers questions slowly
- Inability to problem solve, compute math problems, lack of abstract thinking
- Moves awkwardly/has slurred speech/is drowsy/has uneven pupils
- Shows behavior or personality changes
- Headache/heaviness or pressure
- Nausea/vomiting/vision changes/light or sound sensitivity/“off balance”/dizziness

### What activities are affected by a concussion?

Learning, work, and sports. In short, everything we do can be impacted by a head injury.

### What does recovery look like?

Symptoms may flare when the brain is strained (working harder and longer), even performing what seems like simple tasks. Treatment is physical and cognitive (brain activity) REST. Returning too quickly to full activities (physical or cognitive) can actually SLOW recovery and cause “Second Impact Syndrome” (SIS) or “Post-Concussion Syndrome” (PCS). Second Impact Syndrome happens when the brain has a second injury from returning to physical activity too soon. This can cause the brain to swell, causing damage or death. Activities that require concentration and focus may make symptoms of a MTBI worsen and slow the brain’s healing process. Activities that may need limitation include, but are not limited to: reading, studying, memorizing facts, social activities, video games, watching TV, texting, computer/tablet activities, driving, movies, loud sounds, flashing lights. Every person is different in their recovery rates and symptom flares. Most however, recover within 3-4 weeks. It is recommended that the person get plenty of rest with frequent breaks throughout the day. Returning to normal activities is based on symptoms and is progressive over time and should be coordinated with a medical professional.

### Are there risk factors that prolong recovery?

Yes. A history of learning disabilities, ADD/ADHD, migraines, mental health disorders including sleep disorders, or even a history of a previous concussion.

### How to recognize the recovery is not going well?

Problems with focus and/or concentration. Memory issues or problems learning new information. Irritability/mood changes or any of the symptoms listed above.

We encourage the person with a TBI to be honest and to communicate symptoms to their health care provider. If accommodations are necessary, the Student Accessibility Services may be able to help.

**References:**

[Ohio Department of Education-Traumatic Brain injury](#)  
[Ohio Department of Health-return to play](#)  
[Ohio Department of Health-return to learn](#)

**Additional Resources:**

[National Resource Center for Traumatic Brain Injury \(NRCTBI\)](#)  
[American Academy of Family Physicians - \*Traumatic brain injury\*](#)  
[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Returning to School after a Concussion](#)