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Law

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Important patient information after sustaining a concussion or mild Traumatic Brain Injury



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Introduction

Brain injuries are often referred to as ‘invisible injuries’, because it’s impossible for others to fully understand what’s happening below the surface. While there are a lot of common symptoms and issues associated with brain injuries, every case is unique.

Because each person’s journey to recovery takes a different path, after a mild brain injury (such as concussion), it can be hard to get the big picture of the obstacles you may face, and the treatment and support options available.

This guide is designed to offer you all the information you’ll need to know after sustaining a mild Traumatic Brain Injury - from the immediate impact of a TBI right through to the longer-term impact on your life.

About mild brain injuries



Minor brain injuries are usually caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head that results in a temporary disturbance to the brain's functionality.

Concussions are the most common type of brain injury, with symptoms usually lasting only a few days or weeks, although some patients can experience symptoms up to 12 months after the injury.

Medical professionals class a brain injury as 'mild' if a person experiences a loss of consciousness or disorientation for less than 30 minutes.

Unfortunately, mild TBIs usually don't show up on CT or MRI scans, making them difficult to fully diagnose and understand. Most people are normally discharged from the hospital quickly and will experience no long-term damage to the brain. It's not uncommon, however, for 'mild' injuries to be more serious than first thought.

Often the seriousness of 'mild' TBIs isn't obvious to either medical staff or the patients themselves. While some people recover from a mild TBI quickly, others can experience lasting effects from their injury.

[Researchers have found that about 15% of patients](#) who are diagnosed with a mild TBI continue to suffer serious symptoms long after their injury. Unfortunately, many people underestimate their TBI, and try to get back to normal life too quickly, resulting in more serious problems.

That's why it's important to take your symptoms seriously, and be patient on your road to recovery.



Vital signs to look out for immediately after a brain injury

If you are experiencing any of the following symptoms in the days after sustaining a brain injury, you should go immediately to your nearest emergency department:

Vomiting	Convulsions or fits	Collapsing or suddenly passing out	Unconsciousness or trouble staying conscious (e.g. problems keeping your eyes open)
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Any confusion (e.g. not knowing where you are and getting things mixed up)	Problems with speech or understanding conversations	Clear fluid or blood coming out of ears or nose	New deafness in one or both ears	Problems with balance or walking
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Weakness in arms or legs	Problems with sight	Severe headache that is not relieved by painkillers	Unusual drowsiness when you'd normally be wide awake
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What are the symptoms of a mild brain injury?

Immediately after suffering a brain injury, it's likely you'll experience some of the following symptoms:



Mild Headache



Feeling nauseas
(without being sick)



Dizziness



Irritability and
bad temper



Concentration issues
and problems with
memory



Tiredness



Lack of
appetite



Sleep problems
such as disturbed
sleep

These are some of the more common symptoms people with brain injuries experience, but there are a wide range of different issues associated with mild TBIs too. These are usually divided into three categories: cognitive, physical and emotional symptoms. Let's have a look at each category.



Cognitive symptoms

'Cognitive' refers to the way we think and process information. A brain injury can affect how a person thinks, learns and remembers. Often, when somebody experiences a brain injury, they can get stressed or worried about the changes they're experiencing. While this is completely understandable, it can unfortunately make these problems worse.

Here are some of the most common cognitive symptoms you may be struggling with:

Memory
problems

Concentration
and attention
span



Memory problems

Memory is one of the most common issues associated with brain injuries. Struggling to remember things can be frustrating, both for you and your loved ones. Fortunately, your memory should improve as you recover from your injury.



There are also a few things you can do to make life a little easier for you and your family during this journey. Using post-it notes, calendars and diaries can help remind you to do important things, such as lock the door, remember your wallet when you leave the house, or attend appointments.

It can also be useful to carry a notebook and pen with you to write down anything you need to remember. Tidying things away to a specific place is also a good tip for remembering where things are stored around the house.

Concentration and attention span



It's also common for people to struggle with concentration and attention span after a brain injury. This makes it particularly difficult to focus in loud environments, or concentrate on two things at once. A brain injury can impact our concentration span, making it hard to stay alert at work or school, which often affects your performance.

If you're struggling with concentration, try to do any important tasks while you still feel alert.

It's also a good idea to reduce background noise where possible, and complete anything you want to get done somewhere quiet. Try doing only one task at a time, and slowly build your concentration levels back up to avoid getting frustrated.



Physical symptoms

As well as problems with thinking and processing information, you may also be struggling with a number of physical issues too. Because the brain is so central to how we function, any injuries to your head can cause problems with everyday tasks.

Like the symptoms above, physical problems will get better over time - but it's impossible to know how quickly you will recover. Try to stay patient, ease yourself back into physical activities, and listen to your body!

Sleep
problems

Fatigue

Headaches

Dizziness and
balance
problems



Sleep problems

After a mild brain injury, people often experience problems with sleeping. While it can be difficult, it's important that you get enough rest after a brain injury to help your recovery. In the first few weeks, this might be much more than you'd usually need, and even after this initial period has passed, it's still important to get lots of sleep.

Try sticking to a regular sleep routine by going to bed and waking up at the same time every day. Even if you're sleeping well at night, many people need naps to avoid exhaustion. If you do nap, set alarms so you're not snoozing for too long - as this can have an impact on the quality of sleep you get at night.

Stress and worry can also affect sleep. If you're struggling with this, then it's a good idea to try relaxation techniques such as meditation.



Fatigue



Fatigue is not necessarily linked to sleep, as brain injuries can cause extreme tiredness even in people who are sleeping well at night. Feeling exhausted can have a big impact on your daily life, and make normal tasks difficult.

If you keep a diary about your experiences of fatigue, it might be easier to identify any common triggers. If you know what is causing tiredness, you can either avoid these activities if possible, or learn to manage them better in the future.

It's also a good idea to prioritise important tasks when you have more energy. Break your daily routine down into manageable chunks and leave plenty of time to rest in between.

Although it can be frustrating, try not to push yourself too much and recognise when you need to rest. If you try and push through fatigue, it can cause more problems and make the recovery time longer. It's important to ease yourself back into your daily tasks at a pace that suits you.

Headaches

Headaches are a common symptom of mild brain injuries like concussions, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the injury. If your headache is still there after several days and isn't relieved by painkillers, you should go back to the hospital to check for more serious complications.

As you continue to recover, headaches can be a reaction to other symptoms - such as fatigue, stress and worry, or concentration and memory issues. As with fatigue, you should try to keep a diary of your headaches to identify what causes them.

Although headaches can often be very uncomfortable, try not to become too reliant on painkillers - as long-term use of certain medications can be addictive, which actually makes headaches worse.



Dizziness and balance problems

Brain injuries can cause problems with balance and lead to feelings of dizziness. You may find that you're unsteady on your feet and have problems with coordination, often bumping into things.

These symptoms will usually pass quite quickly, but make sure to take extra care early on, particularly when crossing the road. You should never drive if you have any balance problems or are experiencing dizziness.



Emotional symptoms

After suffering a mild brain injury, it's normal for your emotions to be all over the place. Feelings of frustration, sadness, confusion and anxiety are all common and completely understandable. It's often difficult to express your feelings after a brain injury, and for your family and friends to fully understand what you're going through.

The important thing to remember is that your loved ones mean well and are trying to help you get better - even if you find yourself clashing with them. If you want to talk to somebody, you can find information on charities who can help you at the end of this guide.

Anger and
irritability

Low mood,
depression and
anxiety



Anger and irritability

Feelings of anger, losing your temper and irritability are common after a brain injury. You can often find yourself getting agitated and annoyed by things that previously wouldn't have bothered you. This is partly because of other symptoms you are experiencing, such as frustration at memory problems, or being annoyed with ongoing fatigue and headaches.



To reduce irritability, rest as much as you can, follow a routine that's familiar to you, and try to recognise anything that triggers your anger. As we mentioned earlier, other things like meditation and relaxation techniques can also help you to relax. If you feel yourself getting angry, try to take some time out to calm down.

Low mood, depression and anxiety

Sustaining a brain injury can be stressful and worrying. It's difficult trying to come to terms with the various symptoms you may be experiencing, which can lead to low mood, as well as feelings of depression and anxiety.



The physical and cognitive symptoms we've looked at can take their toll, and it's normal to feel emotional after a mild brain injury. You can speak to your GP about how you're feeling, and they may be able to refer you to more specialist treatment from a neuropsychologist or healthcare professional who specialises in depression after a brain injury.

After a head injury, a lot of these emotions are a result of trauma to the brain, and may be completely irrational. If you do find that you're a lot more emotional, you shouldn't feel guilty about any outbursts! Understanding the reasons for your emotions will help you to explain them to your family, so they don't take it personally.

Post-Concussion Syndrome

If any other ongoing symptoms are still there after a long period of time, you may be diagnosed with Post-Concussion Syndrome (PCS). Normally, symptoms of a mild brain injury should subside within two weeks. If you are still struggling after this time, you should seek advice from your GP.

Treatment of PCS is usually about managing any ongoing symptoms. Specific treatment and therapies will be recommended depending on what the individual is experiencing.

It can be difficult to come to terms with everything following a brain injury and it's not always obvious what help you need. To make sure you don't suffer any further damage from PCS, it's important to seek help from people who truly understand the complexity of these types of injuries and the impact they can have.

**Book a free consultation
with a specialist head
injury solicitor**



Diagnosing mild brain injuries

As we mentioned earlier, mild brain injuries can be very difficult to diagnose for a number of reasons. Many of the common symptoms associated with brain injuries can also be linked to other conditions, such as depression or chronic fatigue syndrome, and it's not uncommon for a person with a brain injury to be misdiagnosed.

Doctors aren't helped by scans, which can easily miss injuries. Just because a brain injury may not have been properly recognised or diagnosed, it doesn't make the symptoms any less serious for the person who is injured.

After a brain injury, it can sometimes be hard to recognise any changes or explain your

symptoms fully. Family and friends may be able to help you, by discussing how your behaviour has changed.

It's a good idea to keep a diary of your symptoms and experiences to show to your GP. The charity Headway also has a useful [fact sheet](#) to help GPs understand your head injury and how it is affecting you. Requesting copies of your medical notes, whether these are past notes or any future notes, is also a good way to collect all your medical history and symptoms in one place. Asking for past medical notes can take some time and persistence, but will be worth it in the long run, as it might enable your doctor to put the puzzle together more quickly.



How a mild brain injury can impact your life

Mild brain injuries can have a big impact on many different aspects of your life - even if you don't recognise it at first. Here are some everyday things that may be affected by a head injury:



Driving



Alcohol



Sustaining another
brain injury



Playing sports



Returning to
work



Socialising

How a mild brain injury can impact your life

Driving

You should avoid driving until you feel completely well. Many brain injury symptoms, including issues with concentration, dizziness and balance problems, can all impact your ability to drive. When you do feel ready to drive, take things slowly and avoid long journeys. You might also need to inform the DVLA of any changes to your medical condition following a brain injury. Your GP will be able to advise you about this, or you can find out more on the [DVLA website](#).

Alcohol

After a brain injury, people often notice their tolerance to alcohol is a lot lower. It is recommended you avoid alcohol immediately after a brain injury, and only drink again when you are feeling better. Drinking alcohol can also slow down brain injury recovery and make you more likely to sustain further injuries.

Sustaining another brain injury

Knocks to the head have a cumulative effect, and sustaining other brain injuries can cause serious complications. You should avoid activities that increase the risk of injury to your head (such as playing contact sports) until you are feeling better.

How a mild brain injury can impact your life

Playing sports

You should not play any contact sports for at least three weeks after a mild brain injury. If you return too soon, any further injuries to your head can be very dangerous. Many sports (such as football and rugby) have return to play protocols, but other sports are not as strict. You should always be vigilant about returning to play after a head injury. As Headway say – if in doubt, sit it out.

Returning to work

Getting back to work after a brain injury can be a huge step. You might find certain tasks more challenging, or even feel unable to return to the job you did before. Speak to your employer about any worries you may have. They should be able to organise special arrangements to make your return to work as smooth as possible. You may want to consider a gradual return to work or to return on light duties. While you are recovering, try to avoid stressful situations as much as possible, and only return to work when you feel ready.



How a mild brain injury can impact your life

Socialising

The changes in your mood, as well as irritability, fatigue, and being overwhelmed by noisy environments can make socialising hard after a brain injury. Other people might not understand how your brain injury is impacting you or what difficulties you are facing. Even though it can be tricky, try not to shut yourself away. Explain your symptoms to loved ones and try to arrange social activities that are more suitable for you.

After a minor brain injury, these activities should become easier as you recover. If you're still struggling after a few weeks have passed, however, then your injury might be worse than first thought. If you suspect your injury is more serious than your doctor suggested, then we can help you with what steps you need to take next to recover.

**Book a free consultation
with a specialist head
injury solicitor**



Further support after a mild or moderate brain injury

Not having the right support after a brain injury can not only be frustrating - it can seriously impact on the quality of your life. Without the help and attention you need, recovery can be extremely difficult.

While your GP may not be able to diagnose your brain injury, they can refer you to a specialist, such as a neurologist, who will be able to offer more specific assessment and treatment recommendations. However, waiting lists for these specialists can often be long.

You might want to visit a private neurologist to be assessed more quickly - a list of registered clinical neuropsychologists can be found on [The British Psychological Society](#) website.



Charities and support groups

There are also some charities and support groups that can provide you with useful information, advice and guidance after a brain injury. These include:

Headway

Headway is a national charity who provide support to brain injured people and their families. They also have a network of local groups and branches across the UK to provide support for people after a brain injury.

www.headway.org.uk

Tel: 0808 800 2244

BASIC

The Brain and Spinal Injury Centre (BASIC) helps patients to access high-quality rehabilitation and treatment after a brain or spinal injury.

www.basiccharity.org.uk

Tel: 0161 707 6441

Brain Injury Group (BIG)

BIG provide support and information to people living with a brain injury, including injured people, their families and health and social care professionals.

www.braininjuryisbig.org.uk

Tel: 01483 770 999



Helping friends and family to understand brain injuries

Sometimes, friends and family can find it hard to understand a brain injury and how this has impacted on your life. Brain injury is often referred to as an invisible injury, because the injured person may appear completely fine on the outside.

If you're struggling to explain your brain injury to friends and family, it's a good idea to ask them to read the information in this eBook. This can help them to understand mild brain injuries better, and the symptoms and problems you may be facing.

Try to explain to your loved ones how you are feeling and help them understand what they can do to assist with your recovery.



About CFG Law

After a mild brain injury, there is a lot to consider, but the most important thing is having the support in place to make your road to recovery as quick and comfortable as possible.

At CFG Law, we understand how difficult and stressful it can be following a 'mild' TBI that may be more serious than first thought. Accessing the right treatment and understanding the impact this type of injury has on your day-to-day life is often confusing and difficult.

That's why we help our clients by offering more than expert legal advice. We work with medical professionals and charity organisations to help you get access to all the diagnosis, treatment options and funding you will need to get better. Our team of solicitors are not just experienced with traumatic brain injury cases, but dedicated to helping your recovery in any way they can.

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