

Tips to Feel Better After a Mild Traumatic Brain Injury or Concussion



Symptoms of mild traumatic brain injury and concussion are different for each person and may change during recovery. You may have one or more symptoms that affect how you feel, think, act, or sleep. Getting instructions from your doctor, and help with your daily activities (like driving, taking care of children, work, or school) can help you get back to a regular routine more quickly.

If your symptoms are affecting your ability to work, talk with your employer about Employee Assistance Programs or other support services that may be available to you.

This handout lists symptoms you may experience and tips to address each symptom to help your recovery. Many of the tips can help with more than one symptom. Share your symptoms with your doctor. There may be treatments that can help.

	Symptom	Examples of How You May Feel or Act	Tips to Help With Your Recovery
Physical	Headaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pain in the head or neck • Trouble with concentration • Problems with vision • Increased irritability • Lack of energy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask your doctor about over-the-counter medications you can take for headaches. • Drink enough water to stay well-hydrated. • Use relaxation strategies to lessen muscle tension, including in your neck, face, and head. • Shorten work or school day if symptoms do not get better. • Reduce the lights and noise in your surroundings and/or lessen the amount of time you use screens (computers, tablets, smartphones) if these activities make symptoms worse. • Ask your doctor about treatment options if headaches prevent you from doing your regular activities or continue for two or more weeks.
	Bothered by light or noise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable to concentrate or feeling distracted in bright or noisy environments • Pain in head, headaches, or nausea when in bright or noisy environments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the first few days or week, wear sunglasses or a hat when outside or when exposed to bright lights or sunlight. After this time, reduce use of these items to allow your brain to get used to bright lights. • For the first few days or week of the injury, avoid noisy/crowded places or wear earplugs or headphones. After this time, reduce use of these items to allow your brain to get used to loud noises. • Lessen the amount of time you use screens (computers, tablets, etc.) if these activities make symptoms worse.

	Symptom	Examples of How You May Feel or Act	Tips to Help With Your Recovery
Physical	Dizziness or balance problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling weak or unsteady when walking • Feeling nauseated • Feeling lightheaded or like the room is spinning or moving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to your doctor about treatments, such as vestibular therapies, if symptoms last longer than 2 to 3 days. • Take steps to avoid a fall, such as using a cane or walker.
	Feeling tired	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of energy • Slowed reaction time • Trouble making decisions or thinking clearly • Feeling more frustrated or more easily angered than usual. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take rest breaks in a quiet place during the day, as needed. • Switch between activities every 30 minutes. • Exercise to increase your heart rate by walking, swimming, pedaling on a stationary bike, when possible. • Shorten your work or school day if symptoms do not get better.
Thinking or Remembering	Attention or concentration problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only able to focus on things for short amounts of time • Trouble planning or organizing tasks or activities • More frustrated or easily angered than usual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep background noise and other possible distractions to a minimum. • Prioritize important activities for when your concentration is better. • Talk with your employer or school about the possibility of shortening or breaking down tasks into smaller activities or steps, lessening workload or amount of activity, and providing more time to complete tasks.
	Memory problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty learning new information or how to do new activities • Trouble remembering information or familiar places, people, or things • Difficulty following instructions or directions • Feeling more anxious or frustrated than usual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write down important information or tasks. • Set reminders or ask others to remind you of information or tasks. • Talk with your employer or school about the possibility of getting directions or key information repeated or breaking down information into smaller chunks or pieces. • Tie information to familiar things, such as events, objects, or people.
	Feeling slowed down	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable to keep pace with workload • Slower reading or writing than usual • Difficulty processing information • Less mental energy • Trouble thinking clearly • Trouble formulating thoughts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take rest breaks throughout the day, as needed. • Talk with your employer or school about the possibility of extending deadlines to complete tasks and providing extra time to learn information.

	Symptom	Examples of How You May Feel or Act	Tips to Help With Your Recovery
Social or Emotional	Irritability or easily angered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having less patience than usual • Feeling worried or frustrated • Less able to manage stress or stressful situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take rest breaks in a quiet place during the day, as needed. • Do relaxation exercises, such as deep breathing or meditation. • Talk to a trusted friend or loved one about how you are feeling. • Look for opportunities to lessen the amount of stress you feel.
	Anxiety or nervousness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling worried, fearful, or overwhelmed • Unable to relax • Nauseated or lightheaded • Rapid breathing or heart rate • Less able to manage stress or stressful situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share your symptoms with your doctor. There may be treatments that can help. • Do relaxation exercises, such as deep breathing or meditation. • Talk with your employer or school about the possibility of extending time to complete tasks. • Talk to a trusted friend or loved one about how you are feeling.
	Sadness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawal from work, school, or friends • Feeling helpless or hopeless • Lack of energy or interest in your regular activities • Trouble making decisions or thinking clearly • Problems with sleep 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share your symptoms with your doctor. There may be treatments that can help. • Try to keep up social and leisure activities even if you don't feel like it. • Exercise to increase your heart rate by walking, swimming, pedaling on a stationery bike, when possible. • Talk to a trusted friend or loved one about how you are feeling. • Avoid drinking alcohol. • Contact the 988 Suicide Crisis Lifeline if you are experiencing mental health-related distress or are worried about a loved one who may need crisis support. Call or text 988 or Chat online.
Sleep	Problems with sleeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard to wake up, shifted sleep schedule • More irritable or easily angered than usual • Lack of energy • Feeling tired, groggy • Trouble making decisions or thinking clearly • Slowed reaction time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep a set bedtime routine with fixed sleep and wake up times as much as possible. • Exercise to increase your heart rate by walking, swimming, pedaling on a stationery bike, when possible. • Avoid or limit food and drinks with caffeine. • Explore setting up a later work or school start time. • Allow for rest breaks during the day, as needed. • Avoid screen time and loud music right before bed. • Sleep in a dark, cool room.

What if I don't feel like I am getting better?

Talk with your doctor, family members, caregivers, and loved ones about how you are feeling. You may need to see a specialist who has experience treating brain injuries.

More information on where to get help and steps you can take to help safely return to your regular activities can be found at www.cdc.gov/traumatic-brain-injury

