

# 5 Things to Know About Traumatic Brain Injuries

**What is a Traumatic Brain Injury?** A traumatic brain injury (TBI) is defined as a blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the function of the brain. The severity of such an injury may range from: “mild” – i.e., a brief change in mental status or consciousness, to “severe” – i.e., an extended period of unconsciousness or amnesia after the injury.

**What Causes a Traumatic Brain Injury?** A TBI occurs when an outside force impacts the head hard enough to cause the brain to move within the skull, or if the force causes the skull to break and directly hurts the brain. Rapid acceleration/deceleration of the head can also force the brain to move back and forth inside the skull, which pulls apart nerve fibers and causes damage to brain tissue. The most common causes of TBI are:

- Falls
- Motor vehicle-traffic crashes
- Physical violence
- Sports accidents

**What are the symptoms of a TBI?** A person with a brain injury can experience a variety of symptoms, but not necessarily all of the following symptoms:

- Lethargy (sluggish, sleepy, gets tired easily)
- Continuous headache
- Confusion
- Ringing in the ears, or changes in ability to hear
- Vision changes (blurred vision, seeing double, light-sensitive)
- Dilated pupils
- Difficulty thinking (memory problems, poor judgment, poor attention span, slow thought process)
- Dizziness or balance problems
- Inappropriate emotional responses (irritability, easily frustrated, inappropriate crying or laughing)
- Difficulty speaking (slurred speech)
- Respiratory problems (slow or uneven breathing)
- Vomiting
- Body numbness or tingling
- Paralysis (difficulty moving body parts, weakness, poor coordination)
- Semi-comatose (not alert and unable to respond to others)
- Loss of consciousness

## **Who is at Highest Risk for TBI?**

- The two age groups at the highest first for TBI are 0-4 year olds and 15-19 year olds.
- Males are about 1.5 times as likely as females to sustain a TBI.
- Certain life style options (occupational, sports) can increase the risk of sustaining a TBI.
- African Americans have the highest death rate from TBI.

**What to Do if You Think a Child Has a Brain Injury?** For mild head injuries, be sure to watch the child closely for 24 hours when symptoms that might develop. If the child is acting normal, they are probably OK. Make sure they can pay attention. Ask them questions and have them follow your finger with their eyes. Call their parents and consult with them on whether the child should remain at school.

If a child shows any of the symptoms listed after sustaining a blow or jolt to the head, contact parents immediately. If parents cannot be reached, dial 9-1-1 and transport the child to the nearest hospital.