

HELP WITH ONGOING SYMPTOMS AFTER CONCUSSION

Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center



U.S. Army photo by Jerry Woller

WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a head injury resulting from a hit, blow or jolt to the head that:

- May briefly cause you to lose consciousness
- May make you feel dazed, confused or “see stars” (this is known as an alteration or change in consciousness)
- Can occur even without being “knocked out” (also known as losing consciousness)
- Temporarily changes how the brain works
- Is a mild traumatic brain injury (or mild TBI), which is another way of saying “concussion”
- Can result in a wide variety of symptoms including (but not limited to) headaches, irritability, fatigue, balance difficulties, sleep disturbance, dizziness, ringing in the ears, blurred vision, concentration or memory difficulties, and other problems

HOW LONG DO THE SYMPTOMS LAST?

- Most people recover from a concussion within hours to days or weeks.
- Occasionally, symptoms may persist longer than expected.
- Persistent symptoms following deployment may result from physical or psychological injuries, other significant events, or conditions such as sleep deprivation and operational stress reactions.
- Sometimes service members are concerned that concussions sustained during deployment will lead to lasting effects after return home, but in fact, most concussion symptoms are temporary.
- The time it takes to heal depends on the individual, the nature of the injury, the number of concussions, and other conditions (such as post-traumatic stress or depression) that may exist.



WHAT IMPACTS YOUR RECOVERY?

- Conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and substance use disorder (SUD) may slow full recovery.
- Talk to your provider about significant events you experienced in theater or during deployment and any symptoms you currently have. Communicate detailed information about all injury events (including history of prior concussions); the sooner you do this the better.

We refer to your injury as a concussion because we want to make sure you realize it's different from the other more severe traumatic brain injuries (or TBIs).

WHO CAN HELP WITH RECOVERY?

- Most health problems resulting from a concussion can be addressed by a primary care provider who is supported by a team of medical specialists.
- Speak with your health care provider about all of your health concerns.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP YOUR RECOVERY?

- The symptoms of a concussion are usually temporary and will resolve faster when your brain gets rest, so it is important for you to take time to gradually recover.
- **Speak up:** Talk to your health care provider about the problems you're experiencing
- **Keep track of your symptoms:** Track ongoing changes in your symptoms and any new symptoms; share this information with your health care provider to help him or her identify possible causes and treatment options.
- **Support your recovery:**
 - Take only medications prescribed for you, take them as directed, and report any side effects
 - Limit your use of caffeine and "energy-enhancing" products
 - Avoid contact sports that can lead to another concussion
 - Get plenty of sleep every day — at least 7-8 hours
- **Seek ways to relax:** Reduce stress and anxiety by trying activities such as yoga, exercise, music or art. Talk to your health care provider about these options to complement your treatment.
- **The most important things that you can do:**
 - Abstain from alcohol and drug use
 - Relax and give yourself time to heal
 - Get plenty of sleep and rest
 - Be honest with your health care provider
 - Avoid further head injury
 - Expect a full recovery