

BRAIN INJURY IN CHILDREN

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) occurs after a child sustains a head injury. TBIs affect thousands of children each year with most cases occurring during the summer months. The severity of a TBI can vary greatly from concussions to injuries requiring hospitalization or surgery.

Head injuries in children can be tricky, and parents often have a hard time deciding whether to go to their doctor or emergency room. ***It is always important to seek treatment after a head injury.***

- **Common acute symptoms that require immediate attention:**

Loss of consciousness
Vomiting
Lethargy (very tired)

Confusion
Memory loss

Headache
Disorientation

- **Common cognitive and behavioral symptoms:**

Memory loss for the event

Behavior and personality changes

Increased need for sleep

Irritability

Sensitivity to light, noise and social stimulation

Poor attention

Slowed thinking

Short term memory problems (from day to day or hour to hour)

Disorientation

Trouble finding the right words

Moodiness

- **A brain injury might worsen difficulties your child had before the injury.**

- **Course of Recovery**

You'll notice the most improvement in the first few months, but recovery from brain injury is a very slow process that occurs over several months. You'll notice more gradual improvement for up to one year. Severe brain injuries might require even more time to heal.

Promoting Recovery

There are many things that you can do to help support your child's recovery:

- Allow him/her to rest as much as they need to
- Provide a low-stimulating environment
- Limit activities – including homework
- Return to school gradually, never all at once
- Most importantly, avoid future injuries



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BE CAREFUL!

- It is important that your child **BE CAREFUL** when recovering from a TBI. A secondary brain injury can be devastating when it closely follows the initial injury, even if the initial TBI is mild.
- The effects of TBI are cumulative. A secondary TBI, even years after the initial injury, will be worse than if the original TBI had not occurred.

R

REST EQUALS RECOVERY

- The brain requires **REST** more than anything else. There should be limited stimulation from people, TV, homework, etc. Children may be noticeably more sensitive to the usual activity of the household.
- Typically, swift improvements are seen during the initial 1 – 3 months post injury, then more gradual recovery for months after, depending upon the severity of the injury.

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ACTIVITIES

- There should be a gradual return to school and usual **ACTIVITIES**. It is almost never appropriate to return to school full-time immediately after a TBI.
- NO contact sports or other activities that increase the risk of subsequent injury (e.g., skateboarding, skiing, etc.)

I

IN PROGRESS

- Always remember that children's brain development is **IN PROGRESS**.
- Be mindful that deficits may emerge much later based on the development of the brain and the demands placed on the child as he or she ages.

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NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL FOLLOW-UP

- It is important to have a **NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL FOLLOW-UP** within 1 week to monitor cognitive status and establish educational accommodations.
- A comprehensive neuropsychological evaluation should be completed 4 – 6 weeks post injury to assess for residual cognitive effects and adjust treatment and educational accommodations, if necessary.



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