

Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center

Concussion/Mild Traumatic Brain Injury Rehabilitation:

10 Ways to Improve Your Memory

1. **Get 7 to 8 hours of sleep** - Keep a quiet, cool environment. Go to sleep at the same time nightly. No napping. Avoid high energy video games/movies/television prior to bedtime. Avoid exercise before bedtime.
2. **Write it down** - Keep a notebook and pen with you and write things down; it will keep you on track and help remind you of important things, like taking your medication. Day planners or small calendars help also.
3. **Avoid alcohol, tobacco, excessive caffeine and energy drinks** - These increase sleep problems, anxiety, blood pressure levels, and overall stress.
4. **Prioritize** - Make a list of things that need to be taken care of, place them in order of importance, and check them off when completed.
5. **Get a routine** - Put your keys in the same spot every day. Park in the same areas. Being consistent helps memory and lowers anxiety.
6. **Keep mentally active** - Work crossword puzzles. Read a book. Play a board or card game like solitaire or concentration. Try to learn something new every day.
7. **Decrease your stress level** - Don't take on too much at one time. Keep stress to a minimum. Stress hormones can damage your brain and add to depression and anxiety. Learn to say "no" when feeling overwhelmed. It's also OK to ask for help when you need it. Make time for you.
8. **Stay physically active** - Take the dog for a walk. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Small spurts of exercise add up. The higher blood flow to your brain helps promote cell growth. Exercising is also a mood booster and helps with mental clarity.
9. **Feed your brain** - Eat high quality foods at regular intervals. Fish, colorful fruits and veggies, milk, eggs, whole grain breads, nuts, and beans all help to keep the brain and body healthy.
10. **Avoid further brain injury** - Consider swimming, walking, or running instead of playing football or boxing. Wear a helmet when riding your bike or motorcycle. Drive safely. Stay sober.



This tool is to be used as a patient education resource during a visit with your provider.

Developed by Subject Matter Experts from the DoD and VA

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www.DVBIC.org



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Concussion/Mild Traumatic Brain Injury Rehabilitation:

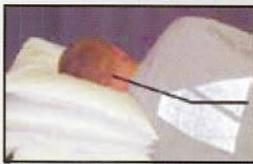
Headache and Neck Pain

3. Sleep Posture:

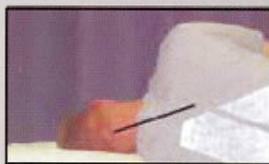
Consider how you sleep: on your stomach, back, side? Now take away the pillow, bring your arms to your sides, and sit up. How does your neck position look? Is it twisted and strained? Does it look or feel like a good position to keep your neck for 6-8 hours every night? And, keep in mind, flipping to the other side doesn't make it "even!"

First, lying on your side is where to start. Then, consider your pillow. Neutral is the key:

Too fluffy:



Too flat:



Just right:



Next, as you lie on your side on your neutral pillow, pull your entire body completely straight. Once your neck is straight, rest your arms, bend your knees, relax your body to a comfortable position. But **RECHECK** your neck position. Most people tend to curl up once they relax. If you have tucked your chin, pull your neck back up. This might feel awkward to start, but will become part of your bedtime routine and natural after about 1-2 weeks. Here's how it looks:



4. Massage:

Massages can be relaxing. Ask for a therapeutic massage. Explain that you get headaches from neck tension. Relax and enjoy.

5. Medication:

Be sure to tell your health care provider about all of the medications and supplements you are taking. Consult with a health care provider prior to using any over-the-counter (OTC) medications. Be advised that OTC medications may make your headaches worse. If you are prescribed headache and/or neck pain medication, take it only as directed and be aware that it may take 2-4 weeks to show improvement.

What Next?

If these conservative approaches are not effective after 2-4 weeks of consistent use, talk to your healthcare provider.

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Mood Changes

Having trouble concentrating?

Easily irritated or on edge?

Feeling overwhelmed, anxious, sad or depressed?

Understand that it is OK to have these feelings. There are things you can do to help manage these feelings. Take deep breaths, and know that the feeling will pass. Do not focus on your worries or troubles. Do something you enjoy.



This is normal and very common after a concussion/mild traumatic brain injury. Fortunately, these feelings get better with time.

Replace the negative thoughts or actions with positive ones. If you are in a situation that is upsetting you, get out of it. Go for a walk. Take a few minutes without disruption to settle yourself.

Do not call yourself bad names or put yourself down. You are not your concussion/mild traumatic brain injury. Life will get better. Stay positive.

Talk to someone you love or trust about these feelings. Many people have felt the same way you have at some point in time. Don't be afraid to express yourself. Your health care provider can also help, so be sure to share your feelings with him or her.

If you have thoughts or feelings of hurting yourself or others, seek emergency care. You can contact the VA Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255). This number is established for both Veterans and Active Duty personnel.

Symptoms associated with TBI are similar to psychological stress. If these mood changes are causing problems at work or home, seek help.

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