

The Missouri Greenbook

Living with Brain Injury



A guide for survivors, families and caregivers



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Effects of TBI

It is hard to predict what changes are likely to occur as a result of a TBI. Each individual is unique. The effects of TBI are not always apparent. TBI is often called “the silent epidemic” because thousands of people

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with TBI have symptoms that are not generally evident to others.

The changes experienced after a TBI depend on a number of factors including:

- Pre-injury: educational and vocational history, health history, history of alcohol and substance abuse, intellectual ability
- Injury characteristics: severity of the injury, secondary complications
- Available medical and rehabilitation resources
- Emotional reaction to the injury
- Family and social support

Common problems associated with injury to the brain may include:

- **Motor:** weakness or paralysis of one side of the body (hemiplegia), poor balance and coordination (ataxia), less endurance, abnormal muscle tone and stiffness
- **Perceptual:** hearing, vision, taste, smell, touch, knowing the relationship of the body to fixed objects

- **Speech and language:** difficulty in expressing thought (aphasia), speaking clearly (dysarthria)
- **Executive functioning:** thinking, reasoning, paying attention, judgment, problem-solving
- **Memory and learning:** problems with short-term memory (storing and retrieving recent information), slower learning, limitations in learning, difficulty with retrieval of long-term memory
- **Emotional changes:** moody, easily frustrated, anxious, impatient, angry, depressed and low self-confidence

In addition, a person with a TBI might find changes in basic bodily functions. These include:

- Body temperature control
- Level of alertness
- Swallowing
- Bowel and bladder function
- Sleep patterns
- Endurance for physical and mental activities
- Sexual function

Seizures may occur after a brain injury. They may happen immediately or much later. It is difficult to predict if a survivor will develop seizures.

A diffuse head injury may be mild to severe. It may cause various difficulties with memory, processing speed, attention and reasoning.