

Traumatic Brain Injury Signs and Symptoms

The signs and symptoms of a traumatic brain injury (TBI) can be subtle. The symptoms may not occur for days or weeks following the injury. They also can be missed as people may look okay even though they may act or feel differently.

An adult should go to the emergency department or see his/her physician if:

- They have headaches or neck pain that do not go away after medication
- They have trouble remembering, concentrating, or making decisions
- They feel tired and have difficulty in waking up completely
- They have behavior or personality changes (feeling sad or angry for no reason)
- They are vomiting after 1 to 2 hours after the injury
- Their size of pupils are different
- They have trouble walking
- They have blurred or double vision
- They have a seizure(s) (convulsion), or a sudden onset of fixed stares
- They have a loss of smell or taste; and ringing in the ears
- They have blood or clear fluid from the nose or ears

A child with a brain injury can have the same symptoms as adults, but it is often difficult for them to let others know how they feel. A child should go to the emergency department or see his/her physician immediately if:

- The child is tired or listless
- The child changed sleep patterns
- The child is vomiting (throwing up)
- The child will not eat or nurse
- The child has a seizure(s) or a sudden onset of daydreaming or a fixed state
- The child has difficulty balancing or walking
- The child is irritable, sad, or cranky
- The child can't see clearly or has blurred or double vision
- The child has a lack of interest in favorite toys or activities
- The child seems confused and not speaking clearly
- The child's size of pupils (black center of the eyes) are different
- The child has increased headaches or stiffness in the neck

If you notice that symptoms are getting worse since the injury, you should contact your doctor about getting help. Getting help soon after the injury by trained specialists may speed recovery.

References:

Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Traumatic Brain Injury Facts: Emergency Medical Services.

National Association of State Head Injury Administrators (NASHIA), Signs and Symptoms.