

Strategies for recovery from Concussion / Mild TBI

Illawarra Brain Injury Service



Health
Illawarra Shoalhaven
Local Health District

The majority of people make a good recovery from a concussion / mild traumatic brain injury (TBI) with limited formal rehabilitation.

Symptoms can often include cognitive or thinking changes that gradually recover over time.

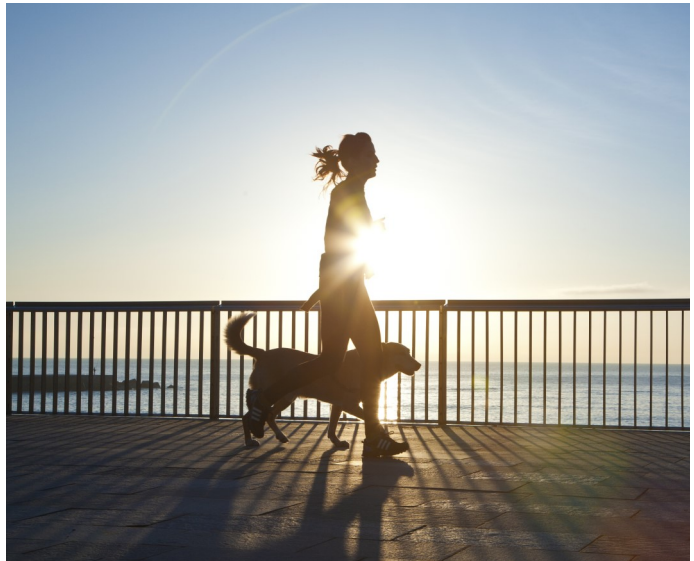
The following is a general guide to a few things you can do to support your cognitive or thinking skills as your brain recovers.



Natural Recovery

When brain cells are injured, the body goes through a natural healing process. Damaged cells undergo repair. This occurs over several months and is a natural process. We can help this natural process by starting with the following:

- A balanced and healthy diet
- Getting good sleep
- Drinking plenty of water
- Getting appropriate levels of exercise
- Finding time to relax and enjoy things
- Managing stress



Strategies to use for recovery

It is also important to do some things differently to help cope with the challenges you may face in the early stages after injury. This is important to help you remain positive.

Some strategies may include:

- Doing one thing at a time rather than many things at once
- Using a diary or making lists to reduce memory errors
- Taking breaks to avoid getting too tired
- Breaking complex or long tasks into smaller steps
- Storing items within easy reach if you have balance problems
- Reducing distractions (like noise) when you have to concentrate.

Sensible levels of mental activity

As you recover it is important to find the level of mental activity that is not too much or too little. The brain can become fatigued if overworked after an injury. It is important to find the activity level that is stimulating but not overwhelming.

This includes how long you do things for, but also how complex the task is. The 'sweet spot' is one where you are doing enough that you do not end up fatigued or frustrated at the end of it. It can take a bit of trial and error to find where your sweet spot is. Rest if you need to.



It is important to gradually build up how challenging a task is. It is better to start basic and increase the level of difficulty. This can avoid you becoming overwhelmed.

Getting back into practical tasks is important for building confidence in your ability to do things after your injury. This helps activate those repairing brain pathways. Judging yourself on your effort level rather than the outcome is also an important way of coping with frustration or disappointment. This will help you keep trying, so things can improve over time.



Natural Rehabilitation Tasks

As you start to get better, you can begin to challenge yourself with structured activities to assist recovery.

Examples include:

- Try to do a safe task under time pressure
- Hold a conversation with a group of 3 or more people
- Dry dishes whilst talking to someone as a multi-tasking skill
- Write a shopping list (less than 6 items) and take it with you to the shop. Then try to get all items without looking at the list.

Check the list at the end and make sure you do not forget anything. Go easy on yourself if you do. It is an activity to exercise your working memory, not a pass/fail test.

- Hold a conversation with background noise for a short period of time
- Watch a TV program and summarise key points during the ad break. This is a memory task.
- Make a conscious effort to keep something in mind whilst doing another task and testing your recall at the end.



Brain Training

There are many brain training apps and programs on the market these days. Some are free or come with free trials. There is a lot of research being done into how well these brain training exercises work. Currently the research does not clearly show direct benefits, but also doesn't show any harm if completed sensibly. Many people find they are a good way to exercise the brain.

Tasks like crosswords, Sudoku and jigsaw puzzles have a similar effect. After a concussion / mild TBI, brain training games or activities that require attention, processing speed, working memory and problem solving are the best to try.

Remember though, find your sweet spot. If you are fatigued or frustrated at the end, you have done too much.

Support and understanding

It is important to spend time with people who are supportive, understand your injury and help you set appropriate goals. Sharing information about concussion/ mild traumatic brain injury with those close to you can be an important way to help others understand and provide positive support.

If you are still struggling 3 months after your concussion / mild TBI, the Illawarra Brain Injury Service (IBIS) can be contacted on 42238470 for further information if needed. Your GP is also a source of information and formal support.



Need an interpreter? Professional interpreters are available if you need help to communicate in English, or if you are Deaf. Our staff can also ask for an interpreter. The staff will book an interpreter for you. Interpreter Services are free and confidential. You can bring a family member or friend with you to the appointment. If you need help to communicate it should be through a professional interpreter. You can also call the Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450 if you need to speak to us before your appointment.