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3.2 Impact of Traumatic Brain Injuries

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Impact of Traumatic Brain Injuries

A Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) can cause behavioral changes such as problems managing emotions, restlessness, problems with social behaviors, refusal to do things, feeling unmotivated or difficulty starting tasks. People who have a moderate to severe TBI are at risk for behavioral changes (Hollis et al., 2021). These may be due to ongoing irritability from the pain and stress of the injury or a change in how the brain works. Some people may have trouble concentrating, thinking or communicating (Hollis et al., 2021).

Emotional Changes as a Result of TBI

A person with TBI may develop depression or impulsivity control issues as they feel like they are no longer the same person they once were before the TBI. It can also result in aggression, outbursts, irritability, and confusion. People with TBI may have difficulty coping with their head injury. They may need to adjust to changes such as loss of independence and their role in the family and society (Zwilling et al., 2022).

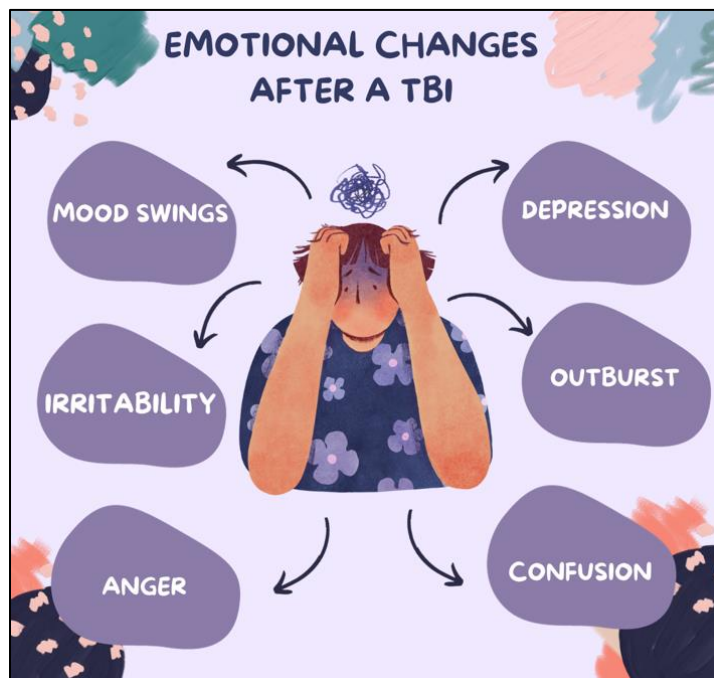


Figure 3.2a
Emotional Changes After Having a Traumatic Brain Injury
Source

Long-term effects of a TBI

Because of TBI, a person may develop motor impairment, sleep disorders, and memory problems/slower thinking. Motor impairment is seen in many severe cases. Most patients diagnosed with a severe case of TBI are in a coma, vegetative state, or partially immobilized, causing them to lose basic motor skills. Conditions stemming from TBI can range from headaches, irritability, and sleep disorders to memory problems, slower thinking, and depression. These conditions often lead to long-term mental and physical health problems that can impair Veterans' employment, family relationships, and reintegration into their homes and communities. Veterans with a history of TBI are more than twice as likely to die by suicide compared to those without the diagnosis (US Department of Veteran Affairs, n.d.).

Some signs of TBI include constant headaches, slurred speech, and sensitivity to light. TBI requires specific criteria to be medically diagnosed, usually involving CAT scans, MRIs, X-rays, and a series of tests. Other warning signs may include nausea, dizziness, constant headaches, slurred speech, sensitivity to light, and loss of consciousness (US Department of Veteran Affairs, n.d.).



How to Address Emotional Concerns after a TBI

Emotional distress or negative, uncomfortable emotions are not a sign of weakness; it is nobody’s fault. Counseling can help with emotional pain after TBI.

Stressful situations can trigger emotional distress. People with TBI can reduce their stress levels by using relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or muscle relaxation and scheduling breaks. Listening to music might also help (Figure 3.2b).

[Changes in Emotions After Traumatic Brain Injury](https://msktc.org/tbi/factsheets/changes-emotion-after-traumatic-brain-injury#)
<https://msktc.org/tbi/factsheets/changes-emotion-after-traumatic-brain-injury#>

Figure 3.2b
Strategies to Reduce Stress Levels for People With TBI
Source
 Zwilling et al., 2022

Impact of Traumatic Brain Injuries on Families

In some cases, TBI can lead to the inability of service members or Veterans to live independently. When this happens, family members become caregivers, advocates, and managers to ensure that service members and Veterans with TBI receive the care they need. They also bear primary responsibility for assisting the person with TBI with physical, mental, financial, and leisure activities. Some daily activities for caregivers include attending to personal hygiene, dressing and

undressing, housework, administering medications, managing money, running errands, shopping for groceries or clothing, transportation, meal preparation, cleanup, etc.

This experience also impacts family members in ways that create significant stress. The Veteran's behavior might change and make them difficult or frustrating to live with. Further, if spouses need to become caretakers, the stress of caring for a loved one may result in depression, anxiety, and other stress reactions. Also, because of caring for or working with a loved one with TBI, unhealthy family functioning can occur, and/or marital or relationship partners may seek divorce or relationship dissolution (Zwilling et al., 2022).

References

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- Zwilling, A., Sander, A. & Hanks, R. (2022, *Changes in Emotion After Traumatic Brain Injury*. Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center (MSKTC). <https://msktc.org/tbi/factsheets/changes-emotion-after-traumatic-brain-injury>