

# Traumatic Brain Injury



Each year, over 4,000 of Pennsylvania's children/adolescents survive severe traumatic brain injuries significant enough to require hospitalization. Many are left with life-altering difficulties in physical, cognitive, or behavioral functioning.

## If your child exhibits any of these symptoms:

- Seizure: eyes fluttering, body going stiff, staring into space
- Forgets everything, amnesia
- Hands shake, tremors, muscles get weak, loss of muscle tone
- Nausea or vomiting

Consult your child's doctor immediately!

## When you suspect a brain injury:

Possible Causes:

- Falls
- Motor vehicle crash
- Sports injury
- Physical violence

Many children and adolescents with mild brain injury (concussion) may never see a health care professional or have any long-term difficulties. Some adolescents have problems that may not be noticed right away. You may see changes in your teenager over several months that concern you. This fact sheet lists some of the more prevalent signs of a mild brain injury. Your teen may also be exhibiting symptoms that are not included on this list. If your teen has any of the following problems – **and they persist** – consult your child's doctor.

### Difficulty Thinking

- Has trouble remembering things
- Has trouble paying attention
- Reacts slowly
- Thinks slowly
- Takes things too literally, doesn't understand jokes
- Understands words but not their meaning

- Thinks about the same thing over and over
- Has trouble learning new things
- Has trouble putting things in order (desk, room, papers)
- Has trouble making decisions
- Has trouble planning, starting, doing and finishing a task
- Has trouble remembering to do things on time
- Makes poor choices (loss of common sense)

### Trouble Communicating

- Changes the subject, has trouble staying on topic
- Has trouble thinking of the right word
- Has trouble listening
- Has trouble paying attention, can't have long conversations
- Does not say things clearly
- Has trouble reading
- Talks too much

### Changes in Personality, Mood, or Behavior

- Is irritable, anxious, restless
- Gets upset or frustrated easily
- Overreacts, cries or laughs too easily
- Has mood swings
- Wants to be alone or away from people
- Is afraid of others, blames others
- Wants to be taken care of
- Does not know how to act with people
- Takes risks without thinking first
- Depressed
- Doesn't want to do anything, can't "get started"
- Is tired, drowsy
- Is slow to respond, to process information, or to complete tasks

- Trips, falls, drops things, is awkward
- Eats too little, eats all the time, or eats things that aren't food
- Has different sexual behavior
- Starts using or has a different reaction to alcohol or drugs
- Takes off clothes in public
- Change in relationships with friends
- Variation in school/academic performance

## Health Problems

- Headaches, including:
  - Recurring headache
  - Pain in the head muscle
  - Pain in the skull
  - Pain below the ear
  - Pain in the jaw
  - Pain in or around the eyes
- Balance Problems
  - Dizziness
  - Trouble with balance
- Sensory Changes
  - Bothered by smells
  - Experiences changes in taste or smell
  - Experiences appetite changes
  - Ringing in the ears
  - Hearing loss
  - Bothered by noises
  - Can't handle normal background noise
  - Feels too hot
  - Feels too cold
  - Doesn't feel temperature at all
  - Blurry vision
  - Seeing double
  - Hard to see clearly (hard to focus)
  - Bothered by light
- Sleep Problems
  - Can't sleep through the night
  - Sleeps too much
  - Days and nights get mixed up
- Pain Problems
  - Neck and shoulder pain
  - Unexplained body pain

## What to Do:

If your child has any of the problems on this list, and they persist, ask your child's doctor to have your child seen by a specialist in brain injury who can help your adolescent learn skills (rehabilitation).

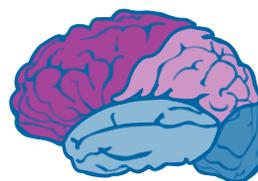
If your child experiences any changes listed on this sheet that impact his or her education at school, contact:

- The BrainsSTEPS Program  
Brenda Eagan Brown, M.S.Ed.  
School Re-Entry Program Coordinator  
eaganbrown@biapa.org  
724-944-6542  
www.brainsteps.net

or

- The Brain Injury Association of Pennsylvania  
Brain Injury Resource Line: 800-444-6443  
www.biapa.org

## BrainSTEPS



## Brain Injury School Re-Entry Program



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