

PTSD AND OTHER STRESS-RELATED DISORDERS FOLLOWING CONCUSSION/MILD TBI

Traumatic Brain Injury Center of Excellence

Concussion, also known as a mild traumatic brain injury, is a head injury resulting from a hit, blast, blow, or jolt to the head. Often, this injury event is shocking, scary, or dangerous and may cause an intense emotional response. Although these are normal and expected reactions that generally lessen with time, in some cases—like when the traumatic event occurs in combat—difficulty coping continues for a longer period. When this interferes with everyday life, you may be experiencing a stress-related disorder.

COMMON STRESS-RELATED DISORDERS AFTER CONCUSSION

Adjustment Disorder

This is when a person has difficulty coping with a stressful life event, such as sustaining a concussion. Often there is preoccupation and excessive worry about the event and its impact.

Acute Stress Disorder

This condition may develop within days or weeks after living through or witnessing a life-changing event involving death, serious injury, or threat to safety. Typically, a person will have repeated memories of the event causing them to reexperience the same intense fear, helplessness, or horror initially felt. The traumatic memories can be triggered by unwanted images, thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks, leading to avoidance of activities, places, people, or other reminders of the traumatic event.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD is very similar to acute stress disorder. It is typically diagnosed when the symptoms of intrusive thoughts, avoidance of reminders, outbursts of anger, and heightened reactivity persist and profoundly affect relationships, work, and daily activities. To learn more about PTSD, scan the QR codes.

Symptoms of Stress-Related Disorders



[VA National Center
for PTSD](#)



[Uniformed
Services University
Resources for PTSD](#)

CONCUSSION AND STRESS-RELATED DISORDER SYMPTOMS

It is often difficult to determine the source of your symptoms since concussion and stress-related disorders have many similar features:

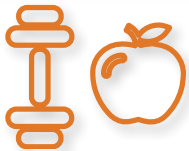
- Fatigue
- Sleep problems
- Trouble with memory and attention
- Feeling depressed
- Feeling anxious
- Irritability
- Headaches
- Dizziness or balance problems
- Nausea
- Sensitivity to light and sound
- Vision changes
- Impulsivity
- Avoidance
- Emotional numbness

MANAGEMENT OF SYMPTOMS

Research has shown that if not properly addressed, both concussion and stress-related symptoms can worsen. If you are experiencing symptoms, it is important to speak with your provider so that you can be appropriately screened. Regardless of the cause, the goal is treating symptoms of both concussion and stress-related disorder. Below are some strategies that can help you reach your treatment goals.

Establish Social Support

Social support systems may include family, colleagues, peer support groups, and community engagement. These interactions can provide a safe space to express feelings, talk about the traumatic event, express emotions, and reduce the intensity of distressing thoughts.



Maintain Healthy Habits

Eating nutritious meals, exercising regularly, getting adequate sleep, quitting smoking, and limiting alcohol and caffeine can help you better manage strong emotions.

Reduce Stress

Relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, guided imagery, biofeedback, and mindfulness, can help reduce symptoms. Try some [DHA](#) and [VA](#) apps that can guide you through several of these relaxation exercises.



Integrate Therapy

Several therapies specifically address trauma symptoms:

- Prolonged exposure therapy
- Cognitive processing therapy
- Cognitive behavioral therapy, commonly referred to as CBT
- Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing therapy, commonly referred to as EMDR

Do you have questions about this fact sheet? Feedback? Email dha.TBICoEinfo@health.mil.