What is traumatic brain injury (TBI)?

It is an injury to the head/brain caused by an external trauma or force. Sometimes there is a loss of consciousness.

Common causes of TBI include: a car wreck, fall, blow to the head, or blast exposure.

Blast exposure (improvised explosive device, bomb, rocket propelled grenade, land mines) are the leading causes of TBI for active duty military personnel in the war zones of Afghanistan and Iraq.

The majority of patients with TBI have suffered a mild concussion or a mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI) resulting in short term symptoms.

What are common symptoms I may feel?

Common symptoms of mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI) are:

- Sensitivity to bright light
- Balance problems
- Sleep problems
- Memory/concentration problems
- Irritability
- Headaches
- Dizziness

It is common for a person with mTBI to experience problems with tasks such as:

- Remembering things
- Problem solving
- Managing money
- Making decisions
- Driving a car
- Remembering directions

Many symptoms associated with PTSD overlap with symptoms of mTBI. These symptoms may also be experienced by individuals who have never suffered a mTBI.

Anxiety, depression, pain, and sleep problems can also affect attention, concentration, and memory.

If I am diagnosed with a mTBI, will my symptoms get better?

Yes, 80-90% of patients who have symptoms fully recover with time. Only a very small number of people who have suffered a concussion will have ongoing symptoms.

Many ongoing symptoms also affect to other factors such as depression, PTSD, sleep disturbances, pain issues, and drug/alcohol use.
What are some of the things I can do to help with my recovery?

- Attend all your appointments and follow the treatment plan prescribed for you.
- Practice and apply the skills you learn to everyday living.
- Get plenty of sleep at night
- Ask family and friends to provide you with reminders
- Avoid alcohol

To help with memory:
  - Write down important information in a notebook or cell phone (appointments, addresses, phone numbers, to do lists, medications, questions for your doctors etc.)
  - Set alarm(s) in your cell phone/PDA for extra reminders.
  - Put important items such as keys and wallet in the same place every day.

To help with irritability and concentration:
  - Use relaxation techniques and breathing exercises to manage irritability and anxiety.
  - Do one thing at a time in a quiet surrounding.
  - Walk away from a situation that is irritating you.

- Talk with your physicians and therapists by asking questions and stating concerns as they come up. Write down and/or record their responses.

What can family and friends do to help a person with TBI?

- Learn about TBI and the recovery process.
- Be involved with the care and treatment.
- Give support.
- Remind the affected Veteran to write down appointments. Prompt him/her to check His/her calendar so appointments and therapies are not missed.
- Learn ways to help the affected person be independent.
- Offer help by encouraging the use of skills learned in therapy.

Goal:
Setting realistic goals with your therapists and practicing techniques you have learned with your therapist can help you improve your ability to function independently at home and in society. Part of your therapy and rehabilitation is about learning strategies and skills to improve the difficulties caused by your head injury. Talk with your therapists, keep a positive outlook, and be patient with yourself.

Visit the following websites for more information and resources about TBI:

- www.traumaticbraininjuryatoz.org/
- www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury/
- www.dvbic.org/