

Guideline for Concussion/Mild Traumatic Brain Injury and Persistent Symptoms

3rd Edition - for adults, +18 years of age



Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation
Fondation ontarienne de neurotraumatologie

Patient Version

This guideline has been created to help with management of concussion/mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI). It is only for management for adults over 18 years of age. The guideline can be used by patients when speaking with healthcare providers about their care. It covers getting a diagnosis, managing symptoms in the early phase (acute) and management in the longer recovery phase (persistent symptoms). It is based on up-to date, quality research evidence, the expertise of providers and the input of patients.

1) Diagnosis and Assessment of Concussion/mTBI

Concussion/mTBI is caused by a direct blow to the head, face, neck or other part of the body that makes your head jolt. It is important to have an assessment and diagnosis as soon as possible after such an injury to ensure you have the best recovery possible.

Concussion is also sometimes called:

- mild traumatic brain injury
- mild TBI
- mTBI
- mild head injury

In this document we call it concussion/mTBI

Who can diagnose a concussion/mTBI?

It is important to see a medical doctor (or nurse practitioner) if a concussion/mTBI is suspected. Your doctor will give you a physical exam and may run tests, if appropriate, to find out if there is any damage to your brain or spine that might need urgent attention.

Other healthcare providers can suspect you have a concussion/mTBI and send you to a medical doctor or nurse practitioner's office, or to the emergency department to get an official diagnosis. Other providers cannot medically diagnose a concussion/mTBI. The brain is the most complicated part of your body. Medical doctors and nurse practitioners have the general medical knowledge to consider your full brain and body function. Doctors and nurse practitioners are able to rule out other health complications, make referrals, prescribe medications and run certain tests.



How is Concussion/mTBI diagnosed?

Doctors or nurse practitioners diagnose a concussion/mTBI by ruling out more severe types of injury to the brain or spine, and other conditions that might cause similar symptoms.

They will do a neurological exam to assess your ability to see and walk, they will examine your balance, reflexes, and muscle strength, and your ability to think and remember things. If necessary, tests can include CT scans of your head and neck.

The doctor or nurse practitioner will ask you about the following:

- Current symptoms and health concerns
- Where and how the injury happened
- How severe the symptoms are and how long they have lasted
- If you have other injuries from the incident
- Any medical and mental health conditions
- Mental or social factors that may affect your recovery
- Your ability to retain information
- History of previous concussion/mTBI
- Prescription medications, over-the-counter medications, and supplements that you are taking
- If you use alcohol, marijuana, or other drugs

Many factors can influence how fast a person will recover. This can affect not only a person's physical wellness, but also their mental wellness. It is important to tell your doctor if you have (or had in the past) a mental health problem, such as depression or anxiety, as this may affect your symptoms and recovery.

Some symptoms of concussion/mTBI are similar to those of other conditions, such as chronic pain, depression, anxiety disorders or sleep disorders. Your doctor will want to monitor the following symptoms from the start:

- Physical pain
- Changes in thinking, emotions, and behaviour
- Communication difficulties