

The 'hidden disability' What to look for

The symptoms of brain injury can be very subtle, and the fact that someone has brain injury is not obvious.

Symptoms of brain injury include:

Physical and sensory problems:

- persistent headaches
- feelings of dizziness
- nausea/vomiting
- visual disturbances (blurred vision, double vision, dislike of bright lights)
- being easily upset by loud noise

Sleep Disturbances:

- altered sleep patterns
- fatigue

Behavioural and mood changes:

- being irritable or easily angered
- restlessness
- feeling frustrated or impatient
- impulsivity and self-control problems
- feeling depressed, tearful and anxious

Cognitive problems:

- difficulties with attention and concentration
- memory problems
- difficulties with problem solving
- taking longer to think
- feeling depressed, tearful and anxious

After a mild brain injury, most people experience post concussion symptoms for several days, and are able to do normal activities within a few weeks.

Full recovery from post concussion symptoms usually occurs within three to six months of the injury.

However, in some cases symptoms fail to resolve and a significant minority of patients continue to experience disabling symptoms for months or even years after their injury.² Longer term social and personal problems that may come to light following a brain injury include:

- problems with personal relationships
- inability to cope with family demands
- difficulty performing routine domestic tasks
- difficulty participating in conversation
- problems at work, e.g. inability to carry out previous duties effectively, slowness in carrying out tasks, finding work more tiring.
- lack of motivation; loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities
- excessive sleeping
- altered sexual drive or function

If you suspect A brain injury ...

It is important to obtain confirmation of the diagnosis. A referral should be made to a specialist trained in the assessment and management of sequelae of brain injury.

This could be any of the following, depending upon service provision in your area:

- Clinical Neuropsychologist
- Neurologist
- Neurosurgeon
- Specialist in Rehabilitation Medicine

Once the brain injury is confirmed, there are specialist brain injury rehabilitation services throughout the UK that can help patients to regain their functional and social skills.

Rehabilitation may involve developing strategies to help compensate for memory problems, advice about adapting a person's employment situation so that they can continue to work, or help in boosting confidence and regaining self-esteem.

Families and carers of persons with a brain injury may also need advice and support. The brain injury also impacts greatly upon the lives of family members, and it is easy for their own needs and difficulties to be overlooked.

Useful clinical instruments

Rivermead post concussion symptoms questionnaire (RPQ)

King, N.S. et al (1995). *The Rivermead Post Concussion Symptoms Questionnaire: A measure of symptoms commonly experienced after head injury and its reliability*. Journal of Neurology, 242, 587-592.

Rivermead head injury follow up questionnaire (RHFUQ)

Crawford, S. et al (1996). *The Rivermead head injury follow up questionnaire: a study of a new rating scale and other measures to evaluate outcome after head injury*. Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry, 60 (5), 510-514.

References

- 1 Cassidy, J.D. et al. (2004). *Incidence, risk factors and prevention of mild traumatic brain injury: results of the WHO Collaborating Centre Task Force on Mild Traumatic Brain Injury*. Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine, 43 Suppl. ,28-60.
- 2 King, N.S. (1996). *Emotional, neuropsychological, and organic factors: their use in the prediction of persisting post concussion symptoms after moderate and mild head injuries*. Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Psychiatry, 61, 75-81.
- 3 Kay, T. et al. (1993). *Definition of mild traumatic brain injury*. Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation, 8, 86-87.