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Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center

TBIMS
Traumatic Brain Injury Model System
Since 1987

Traumatic Brain Injury Resource Bundle for American Indians

Headaches After Traumatic Brain Injury

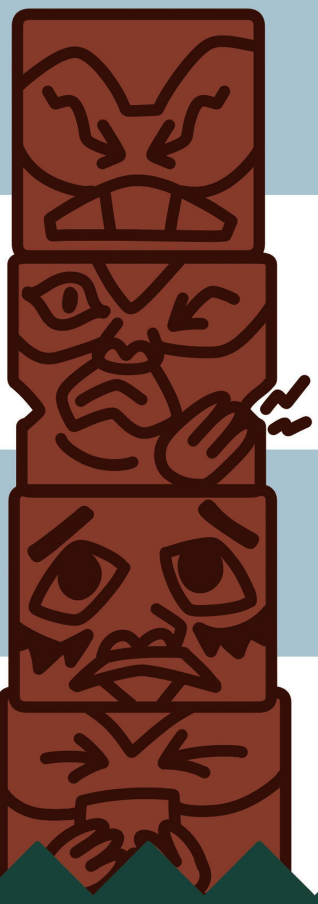
Headaches are common for people who are recovering from a TBI.

Headaches can

- Affect daily life
- Make it hard to think
- Make it hard to remember things

Migraines
Occur when the brain becomes overly sensitive, which causes pain.

Symptoms
Issues with light and sound, vomiting, moderate to severe pain with throbbing.



Cervicogenic Headaches
Caused by problems in the nerves, bones, or muscles in your neck.

Symptoms
Pain starts in the neck, shoulders, and back of the head. Neck movement can make the pain worse.

Tension Headaches
Caused by muscle tension or stress.

Symptoms
Tightness around the head. Typically occurs later in the day.

Rebound Headaches
Caused by overuse of medicine or caffeine use.

Triggers
Medicine wearing off or sudden change in caffeine intake.

Most headaches are not dangerous and do not need immediate care. Those who are recovering from a TBI should seek medical care if

- Headache pain gets worse over time.
- They have nausea and/or vomiting with the headache.
- They have weakness in an arm or leg or problems speaking.
- They have increasing sleepiness with the headache.

Treatment for occasional headaches

- Ibuprofen
- Prescription medicine
- Stretching or massage
- Relaxation—many phone apps and websites can help people manage relaxation

Lifestyle changes to help prevent headaches

- Get enough sleep
- Simple exercise each day, such as walking
- Avoid caffeine and certain foods or drinks (such as red wine or certain cheeses)
- Do not take pain medicine each day unless a doctor prescribes it

Treatment for headaches that occur more than once a week

- Physical therapy to relieve muscle tension causing headaches and improve strength
- Cognitive therapy to help manage stress and pain from reoccurring headaches
- Massage therapy
- Acupuncture to decrease nerve sensitivity
- Nerve stimulation devices to create small electrical impulses that lessen pain

Common medicines used to treat headaches

- Some types of antidepressants (e.g., amitriptyline)
- Medicines for seizures (e.g., topiramate)
- Medicines that block a protein called CGRP (calcitonin gene-related peptide receptor)
- Medicines to lower blood pressure called beta-blockers (e.g., propranolol)
- Botox injections

Speak with your health care provider about an effective treatment strategy for you.

Source: Our health information content is based on research evidence and/or professional consensus and has been reviewed and approved by experts from the TBI Model Systems and Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers. The resource has also been reviewed by American Indians with TBI and their family members. The contents of this resource were developed under grants from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR grant numbers 90DPKT0008 and 90DPKT0009). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of this resource do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, or HHS, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

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