



RETURNING HOME AFTER TBI

A Guide for Caregivers of Service Members and Veterans

Traumatic Brain Injury Center of Excellence



U.S. Air National Guard photo
by Tech. Sgt. Lynn Means

WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT WHEN MY FAMILY MEMBER COMES HOME?

Each person's experience with the effects of TBI is unique. For most of us, a normal and fulfilling life usually includes things like living independently, working, attending school, parenting, dating, and participating in social and leisure activities of our choosing. For a person diagnosed with TBI, some or all of these activities may be challenging, and adjustments to daily life may be necessary. It may seem difficult to prepare for what lies ahead, but, with time, most people with TBI and their families successfully adjust to life after injury.

WHAT ARE SOME TIPS TO USE ONCE MY LOVED ONE IS HOME?

Don't be alarmed if your loved one seems to take a step or two backwards. This is common. Your family member with TBI may need more time to adapt to a new environment, even if it's a familiar one.

Planning and structure can help with the transition. Individuals with TBI adjust better when there is routine and predictability in their days. This can provide opportunities to identify challenges and practice solutions.

- Schedule family and social activities in advance. Remember to include rest breaks.
- Plan activities away from home that encourage independence. Some examples include grocery shopping, picking up kids from school on time, going out to restaurants, and scheduling and attending medical appointments.
- Role-play potential social situations. This strategy can help your loved one and your family anticipate challenging scenarios and build skills to overcome them.

Over time, as everyone adjusts to being home and your family member continues to recover and gain skills, the need for additional structure may decrease, allowing for more flexibility.

Reach out to the rehabilitation team or case manager when additional support is needed. Recreational, speech and occupational therapists can help your loved one practice skills for community reentry.

PRODUCED BY THE DEFENSE HEALTH AGENCY

Released January 2022 by the Traumatic Brain Injury Center of Excellence

This product is reviewed annually and is current until superseded. 800-870-9244 • Health.mil/TBICoE

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

WHAT ARE SOME COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES I MAY ENCOUNTER WHEN MY FAMILY MEMBER COMES HOME?

All severities of TBI can lead to communication challenges. TBI can impair many aspects of communication, including language, thinking, memory, judgment, self-awareness, and social skills. Difficulties with comprehension and exchanging information through speaking, reading, and writing may become worse in stressful situations, such as at work or school. Here are some tips you can use to improve family communication:

Use “I” statements instead of “You” statements. “I” statements convey feelings; no one can argue about your own feelings. “You” statements can seem offensive to the other person, making them feel defensive and more inclined to disagree. For example, if your family member is late to pick you up from an appointment, try saying “I feel upset when you are late to pick me up” instead of “You were late again!”

Avoid using definitive language. Using this type of language may seem like a firm conclusion that cannot be questioned. Terms such as “always”, “never” and “constantly” can sound accusatory.

Speak to a speech language pathologist (SLP) if additional support is needed. An SLP can help your family member better understand and remember what is being said, as well as express needs, wants, and ideas clearly to others.

CAN MY FAMILY MEMBER WITH TBI DRIVE?

Your family member may be eager to get behind the wheel again. However, before doing so, a professional should evaluate their ability to drive safely. This evaluation is usually done by an occupational therapist, physical therapist, neuropsychologist, or certified driving evaluator. To ensure safe driving, they will focus on vision and perceptual skills, such as the ability to judge distances between cars.

As cognitive skills improve, driving ability may be reevaluated, with most patients eventually returning to safe driving. If your family member cannot drive safely, there are other transportation options available, such as public (bus, train, or subway) or medical transport. You can also consider assistance from family members, friends, and church or community groups.



HOW CAN I HELP MY FAMILY MEMBER AVOID ANOTHER TBI?

The effects of repeated injuries to the brain can add up, causing greater damage than the initial injury. For this reason, it is crucial to exercise caution to avoid another TBI. Try using these tips to keep your loved one safe:

Safeguard your home. Remove tripping hazards, such as throw rugs and clutter in walkways. Use nonslip mats in the bathtub and on shower floors, and install grab bars next to the toilet, tub, shower and stairways. Improving lighting throughout the home can also increase safety by enhancing your loved one's ability to see obstacles in the walkway..

Follow the health care team's recommendations on activity restrictions.

Insist on the use of safe practices. Ensure your family member wears a seatbelt in the car. If cleared by the health care team to ride a bike or play contact sports, a helmet should be worn when participating in these recreations. A good rule of thumb is: If a helmet is available for an activity (biking, rollerblading, baseball, etc.), then everyone should wear one.



For more information and resources, refer to TBICoE's [Traumatic Brain Injury: A Guide for Caregivers of Service Members and Veterans](#).