

Traumatic Brain Injury

Eat right, exercise, be well, and be happy. It's a simple plan and no doubt a good one for living a long and healthy life—but sometimes accidents happen, unforeseeable events that literally knock us off our feet and turn our worlds upside down.

So it is with traumatic brain injury. This general condition, often called "TBI," results most often from direct blows to the head. The symptoms range from mild to severe and can affect people behaviorally, emotionally, and physically.

Mild or moderate symptoms, like from a concussion, can be feelings of confusion, difficulty in focusing attention, memory loss, and inability to make fast decisions, as well as restlessness and personality or temperament changes. Some physical symptoms are dizziness, loss of balance, sleep disturbance, and headaches.

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Severe TBI may interfere with even the most basic functions; walking, talking, thinking, and even breathing.

Treatment of such injuries may take weeks, months or years. At Oroville Hospital, physical, occupational, and speech therapists may all play a role in recovery. Even social workers may help patients as they battle strong feelings of grief and helplessness. The goal is to reintegrate people who have sustained brain injury into society, and Oroville Hospital's staff goes to great lengths to meet this end.

"We take everything that we learn in the clinic and then take it out into the real world," says Tama Czarnecki, Director of Rehabilitation at

Oroville Hospital. "We'll go to their workplace, the store, even golfing or bowling if that's what they like to do. We want them to get better and get back on their feet."

Debra Craton, who experienced head trauma from a head-on collision in 2008, says, "I owe my recovery progress to Tama. From day one I felt her genuine care and support."

But the trickiest part about a mild traumatic brain injury is the symptoms' tendency to lurk quietly, affecting people in subtle but significant ways. Czarnecki stresses that any person who has been in an accident should visit the hospital. She adds that even incidents that involved no impact to the head may have caused an injury to the brain.

"Many people feel like they are going crazy because they don't understand what is wrong with them," Czarnecki says. "But just knowing there is a problem can often help people recover."

Debra Craton agrees, "I was having memory problems,

migraines several times a week, and my mind didn't seem to match my mouth. It was very frustrating."

And Czarnecki wants to emphasize that it's never too late for treatment, "There's a misconception that treatment doesn't help after a year...that's wrong. I've worked with people three or four years after their injury and we see improvements."

And, like Debra, we can get back to that plan of ours – living well, living long, and pursuing happiness.



Oroville Hospital