

Discharge advice for patients who have sustained a head injury

You have suffered from a head injury. Please share this information with your family, friends or carers, you may need their help after you leave hospital.

It is very unlikely you will have any further problems but, if you have any of the following symptoms, please go to your nearest hospital Emergency Department as soon as possible:

- unconsciousness, or lack of full consciousness, for example, problems keeping your eyes open
- drowsiness, or feeling sleepy, that goes on for longer than one hour when normally you would be wide awake
- problems understanding or speaking
- loss of balance or problems walking
- weakness in one or more arms or legs
- problems with eyesight
- painful headache that won't go away
- vomiting - being sick
- seizures - convulsions or fits
- clear fluid coming out of your ear or nose
- bleeding from one or both ears.
- continuing concern about your diagnosis

What is a head injury?

Any direct knock on the head or injury causing a violent shake to the head. You may have concussion or suffered a loss of consciousness.

What symptoms might I have?

Over the next few days you may have the following symptoms:

- mild headache
- feel sick, but not actually vomit
- dizziness
- irritability or bad temper
- problems concentrating
- problems with memory
- tiredness
- lack of appetite
- problems sleeping

If you are concerned about any of these symptoms in the first few days after discharge, you should go and see your doctor to talk about them.

If these symptoms do not go away after two weeks, you should go and see your doctor.

What about children?

Children should be supervised closely for at least 24 hours. Children will feel tired and should be allowed to sleep. They will benefit from rest, both physical and mental, until they are symptom free. They may suffer all of the above symptoms, however if they are irritable or have altered behaviour, particularly infants and children aged under five years, you should go to the nearest Emergency Department for review. Children should not return to school until they are back to normal and may need a gradual return to school. Children should not return to contact sports, such as rugby or football for at least 3 weeks following a head injury, and should do this gradually.

What can I do to help my recovery?

- DO**
- make sure a telephone and medical help are within easy reach
 - have plenty of rest and avoid stressful situations
- DO NOT**
- stay at home alone for the first 24 hours after leaving hospital
 - take any alcohol or drugs
 - take sleeping pills, sedatives or tranquilisers unless they are given by a doctor
 - return to your normal school, college or work activity until you feel you have completely recovered
 - drive a car, motorbike or bicycle or operate machinery unless you feel you have completely recovered. We recommend that you seek a doctor's opinion about your ability to drive a car or motorbike

Sporting activities

Adults should not attempt any sport for at least 2 weeks following a head injury assessed in hospital and must be symptom free before a gradual return to play (see links below). Any return to sport should begin with non-contact physical activity and it is important that activity levels do not produce or worsen symptoms. If this happens, please seek medical advice before continuing.

Long-term problems

Most people recover quickly from their incident and do not have any long-term problems. However, some patients can develop problems after a few weeks or months. If you start to feel that things are not quite right, for example you have memory problems or not feeling yourself, then please contact your doctor as soon as possible so that they can check to make sure you are recovering properly.

If you need further information or advice, contact:

Northumberland Specialist Emergency Care Hospital Telephone: 0191 6072137

Further information and support may be found at:

Headway: www.headway.org.uk/home.aspx

The Child Brain Injury Trust: www.childbraininjurytrust.org.uk

Head injury information: <http://www.headinjurysymptoms.org/>

For sports specific advice there are national websites such as:

For football: www.thefa.com/concussion

For rugby: www.rfu.com/headcase

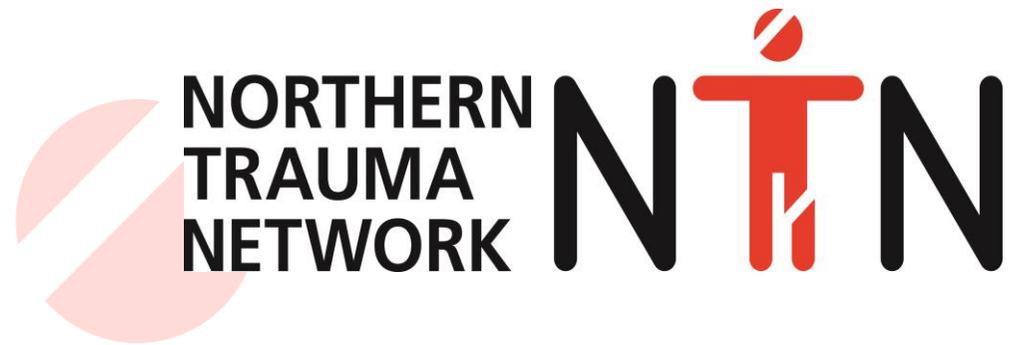
If your head injury was due to alcohol or drug problems and you would like help you can contact the **Alcohol & Drug Treatment Service** on:

North Tyneside

0191 2408122

Northumberland

01670 396303



Driving After a Traumatic Brain Injury

Patient Information Leaflet



How could a traumatic brain injury affect my driving?

Safe driving is a complex activity which needs many different skills. Following a brain injury people can have problems that can impair their ability to drive.

Symptoms that can affect your driving include:

- Problems with vision and hearing
- Difficulties with muscle weakness, control and co-ordination
- Sudden and disabling dizziness
- Fatigue
- Slowed thinking and reaction times
- Memory problems – difficulty in knowing where you are going and how to get there
- Being more impulsive and having anger outbursts
- Loss of ability to read road signs or maps
- Reduced ability to concentrate, to anticipate danger, to plan ahead and be aware of your own limitations
- After a brain injury the risk of developing seizures or epilepsy is slightly increased

Who is not fit to drive after a traumatic brain injury?

This depends on the severity of the brain injury and any disabling symptoms caused by it. You should not drive until you have recovered from any symptoms that would affect safe driving such as those mentioned above.

Further information

This booklet was written by the Northumberland Head Injuries Service. The information in this booklet is based on the guidelines published by the DVLA in June 2017. The guidance from the DVLA is constantly being updated as new evidence regarding brain injuries becomes available.

Please note that the DVLA reserves the right to consider all cases reported to them on an individual basis. Therefore if it is unclear whether you should be driving then the safest option is to wait for a verdict from the DVLA before resuming driving.

References

1. GOV.UK. Traumatic brain injury and driving 2017 [online]
<https://www.gov.uk/brain-injury-and-driving>
Accessed 05/07/2017
2. DVLA. Accessing fitness to drive a guide for medical professionals June 2017[online]
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/618072/assessing-fitness-to-drive-a-guide-for-medical-professionals.pdf
Accessed 05/07/2017
3. Headway. Driving after brain injury May 2016 [online]
<https://www.headway.org.uk/media/3992/driving-after-brain-injury-e-booklet.pdf>
Accessed 05/07/2017

Should I inform my insurance company?

Yes, if you have had any type of brain injury that has affected your ability to drive you should inform your insurance company that you are planning on returning to driving. If you are fit to drive then this should not affect your insurance premiums.

What if I do not follow the advice of my doctor and do not inform the DVLA?

If your doctor has advised you to inform the DVLA and you do not do so you will be breaking the law and this would invalidate your driving licence and insurance. You could also be liable for a £1000 fine for failing to inform the DVLA.

If you have been advised that you are not fit to drive and you continue to do so then you will be putting yourself and other road users at risk. If you cannot be persuaded to stop driving and your doctor is concerned for public safety then they may inform the DVLA on your behalf.

What if I want further advice on getting back to driving?

You can have a driving assessment at your nearest drive mobility centre. Further information can be found at www.mobilitycentres.org.uk/find_a_centre/

What help is available if I cannot drive due to a traumatic brain injury?

There may be concessions on public transport available through your local council or the bus/rail company. For those who are unable to travel on public transport there may be help available from the Access to Work Scheme.

21/12/2017 Further information can be found at www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview
Telephone: 0345 268 8489

Serious Brain Injury

A serious brain injury may include one or more of the following features:

- Being unconscious following the injury
- Being confused and disorientated for over 24 hours after the injury (post traumatic amnesia)
- Having a seizure (fit) caused by the injury
- Developing epilepsy following the injury
- Having a haematoma, brain haemorrhage (bleeding into the brain) or a contusion (bruising on the brain)
- Having surgery to your brain or skull following a brain injury
- Having a visual field defect (loss of a section of vision)

If you have had a serious brain injury then you are likely to require 6-12 months off driving.

If you have developed epilepsy following a brain injury then you will need to comply with the DVLA guidance for epilepsy.

Minor Brain Injury

Even if you have had a minor brain injury you should still not return to driving until you have recovered from any symptoms that could affect safe driving. This would include **sudden and disabling dizziness, poor concentration and blurred vision**. These symptoms usually resolve within a few months. If you have had a minor brain injury you can usually return to driving once you have recovered and will not need to inform the DVLA unless you are advised to do so by your doctor. However if you have disabling symptoms that last over three months then you should take advice from your doctor as you may need to inform the DVLA.

If you are a Group 2 licence holder (heavy goods vehicle or public service vehicle) then the regulations are much stricter. It is advisable to notify the DVLA of any brain injury.

If you are unsure about the seriousness of your brain injury then ask your doctor about this. In some cases your doctor may need to contact the medical advisors at the DVLA for specific advice.

Who decides on whether a person is fit to drive after a traumatic brain injury?

Your doctor will advise you whether your injury is likely to affect your driving ability and whether you need to inform the DVLA of your injury. If you are advised to inform the DVLA then it is your responsibility to do this by law. The doctor will advise whether you are safe to drive while the DVLA is dealing with your case. The final decision on fitness to drive is made by the DVLA.

Information on how to inform the DVLA of your injury is available at

www.gov.uk/head-injury-and-driving

You can telephone the DVLA on Telephone: 0300 790 6806
Monday to Friday, 8am to 5:30pm

Saturday, 8am to 1pm

Or write to Drivers' Medical Enquiries, DVLA Swansea, SA99 1TU

What happens when the DVLA is informed?

A trained medical advisor will look at your case and make a decision on your fitness to drive.

The DVLA will then contact you to advise you of one or more of the following actions:

- You are fit to drive
- You will need to get a new licence
- You must adapt your car
- You must have a medical assessment.
- You must not drive and you must give up your licence. This is called having your licence revoked and is usually for a specified time period. The DVLA will advise you when you can reapply for your licence.

What happens if I have a Group 2 licence?

The rules for returning to driving are stricter as the safety of more people is involved. The process of informing the DVLA is the same.

What if I drive a taxi, emergency services vehicle or health services vehicle?

There are additional requirements for these drivers so you would need to discuss this with your doctor and employer.