

INFORMATION & TIPS FOR

Justice Involved Veterans Living with Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)



The 2.5 million veterans who served after September 11, 2001, are more likely to experience TBI and related negative challenges to their health and wellbeing than prior generations of veterans.

Dr. Mark A. Reger, VA Puget Sound Health Care System

The good news, according to the Department of Defense, is the majority of TBI's experienced by members of the Armed Forces are mild with most service members returning to full duty within 10-14 days.



If you have served in the United States Armed Forces, you are at higher risk of having experienced an injury to your head, neck, and spine than your civilian Peers. This is true, whether you were based in the United States, Europe, Somalia, Iraq, or Afghanistan.

The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs reports that 1 in 7 individuals living with a SCI in the United States are Veterans and more than 11% of military personnel injured in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom are living with SCI.



For some who experienced mild TBI or concussion(s) prior to or at the time of their SCI may find they are living with the thinking, mental health and the physical challenges of both conditions that impact their ability to navigate civilian life.



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF STATE HEAD INJURY
ADMINISTRATORS

This project was supported by the
"Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation."

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How are these injuries classified/defined by civilian and military experts?

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) can be mild, this is also referred to as a concussion, moderate, or severe.

In general, the longer an individual experiences challenges to their thinking, emotions, and physical skills, the more severe the injury and longer lasting the consequences.

Many individuals will show no outward sign of their injury or injuries, others may have obvious coordination and communication challenges.

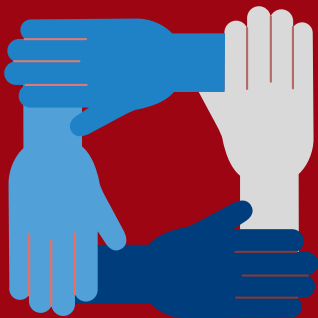
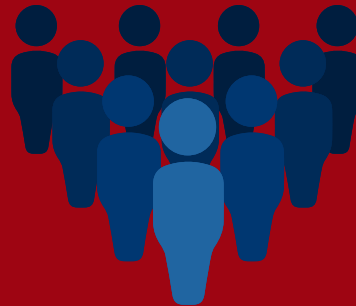
Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) is the result of a disruption of communication between the brain and body, caused by damage to either the spinal cord or surrounding tissue and bones that can result in paralysis, chronic pain, and loss of feeling.

The severity of impact on an individual's ability to control their movement and bodily functions depends on the area of the spinal cord injured.

As a result, some (not necessarily all) individuals living with SCI will use a wheelchair or cane.

Common Causes of Injury to the head, neck and spinal cord include:

- Motor vehicle and motorcycle crashes (on and off base)
- Military Training Accidents
- Fights and Falls
- Recreational and organized sports (rock climbing, soccer)



- Exposure(s) to blast from Improvised Explosive Devices
- Gunshot wound(s)
- Exposure to Overpressure from use of high-powered weapons such as .50 sniper rifle in training or combat

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For those living with a history of injury to the head, neck, and spine the following can interfere with life at home and in the community, often resulting in difficulty getting and keeping a job, being successful in school as well as negatively impacting relationships with family and friends.

Below are common challenges and recommended strategies that can help justice involved veterans cope with injury-related challenges and improve the overall quality of life now and in the future:

Challenges



Trouble remembering what is heard and read, forgetting appointments, or showing up at the wrong time or day.



Trouble paying attention, often finding yourself easily distracted, in conversations, at work or school.



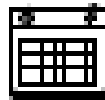
You tend to be impulsive, doing or saying something before thinking through the consequences.



Feeling depressed, anxious, and/or irritable. You find yourself relieving stressful or traumatic memories and events, your sleep may be suffering.

Your use of alcohol and/or other substances has become concerning to yourself, friends, and family members.

Supports and Solutions



Write it down-on paper, on your phone or other device, use a calendar and journal, add alerts to your phone or device.



Ask for clarification, take breaks, paraphrase in your own words what you heard or understood, ask others for extra time to process information, take a break, take a short nap if fatigue is an issue.



Take a break and a breath, walk away, talk the situation through with someone you trust.



Speak to a trusted friend or family member. If these feelings and behaviors persist or get worse, talk to your health care provider, contact your local Veteran Services organization or hospital, contact the VA crisis hotline (call: 1.800.273.8255-Text: 838255).



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Challenges



You are experiencing headaches or pain; balance and coordination are a challenge or have gotten worse.

You are experiencing difficulties with your vision or hearing.

Supports and Solutions



Speak to your healthcare provider.



What are the benefits to participating in Veterans Court?
According to a follow-up study of veterans involved with the Buffalo New York Veterans' Court, participants experienced:

- Vet to Vet support throughout the process provided by a Mentor, who is a successful graduate of Veterans Court
- Better mental health outcomes
- Successful engagement in drug and alcohol treatment programs, leading to long term sobriety
- Improved relationships with family and friends
- Higher rates of stable housing and employment as well as continuing education
- AND...veterans of the Buffalo Veterans Court did NOT reoffend/cycle back into the criminal justice system



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Resources

United States Brain Injury Alliance

<https://usbia.org/>

The United States Brain Injury Alliance aims to build state and national capacity to create a better future alongside individuals affected by brain injury through advocacy, education and information.

Brain Injury Association of America

biausa.org

1-800-444-6443

The Brain Injury Association of America links callers from around the country to local resources.

National Association of State Head Injury Administrators

nashia.org, NASHIA's efforts are aimed at

“assisting state government in promoting partnerships and building systems to meet the needs of individuals with brain injury and their families.” NASHIA offers information on a variety of brain injury related topics including domestic violence, employment and veterans for free. NASHIA also has many publications and webcasts on a variety of brain injury related topics.

The Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation

<https://www.christopherreeve.org/>

The Foundation provides information on living with paralysis, how to get support, research advances and connecting with others within the paralysis community, you can search resources specific to where you live here: <https://www.christopherreeve.org/get-support/resources-in-your-area>

Traumatic Brain Injury Center of Excellence (formerly the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center)

<https://tinyurl.com/2rwrek7j>

An online resource from the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center is an initiative designed to promote traumatic brain injury awareness, education, and prevention.

The Air Force Center for Excellence for Medical Multimedia

tbi.cemmlibrary.org

Includes interactive tools related to brain injury, appropriate for individuals with lived experience, their families, and supporters as well as professionals.



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Resources

The Shepherd Center, Atlanta Georgia

<https://www.spinalinjury101.org/>

The Shepherd Center offers intensive medical treatment and rehabilitation services for individuals living with spinal cord injury and disease, acquired brain injury, multiple sclerosis, chronic pain and other neuromuscular problems.

BrainLine

brainline.org

Website funded through the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center offers civilians, returning service members with brain injury, families, and professionals a variety of information and resources regarding life after brain injury.

