

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)–Related Dementia: A Guide for Patients & Families

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) occurs when a blow, jolt, or injury to the head disrupts normal brain function. In some people—especially after repeated head injuries or severe trauma—long-term changes in memory, mood, and thinking can develop over time. These cognitive problems may appear months or years after the injury. Early recognition, supportive care, and treatment of symptoms can help improve quality of life.

Signs & Symptoms to Watch For

Common Cognitive Symptoms

- Memory problems or difficulty recalling recent events
- Trouble concentrating or staying focused
- Slowed thinking or processing information
- Difficulty planning, organizing, or problem-solving
- Trouble learning new information

Behavioral & Emotional Changes

- Irritability or mood swings
- Depression or anxiety
- Increased impulsivity or poor judgment
- Reduced motivation or apathy
- Social withdrawal

Physical Symptoms

- Headaches
- Dizziness or balance problems
- Fatigue or low energy
- Sleep disturbances
- Sensitivity to light or noise

Typical Presentation & Progression

Early Stage

- Mild memory or concentration problems
- Increased fatigue or headaches
- Subtle mood changes
- Difficulty multitasking

Middle Stage

- Worsening memory and attention problems
- Increased difficulty managing daily responsibilities
- Noticeable mood or behavioral changes
- Slowed thinking or reduced problem-solving ability

Late Stage

- Significant cognitive impairment
- Increased dependence on others for daily activities
- Marked mood or personality changes
- Reduced ability to live independently

Treatment Options

Symptom-Focused Treatments

- Cognitive rehabilitation therapy
- Treatment for mood symptoms such as depression or anxiety
- Sleep management and headache treatment
- Medications that may help cognitive symptoms in selected cases

Supportive Interventions

- Structured routines and memory aids
- Occupational therapy and rehabilitation services
- Regular physical activity and healthy sleep habits
- Social engagement and cognitive stimulation

Diagnostic Tests Your Healthcare Team May Use

Clinical Evaluation

- Review of injury history and symptom progression
- Neurological examination
- Cognitive testing to assess memory, attention, and executive function

Laboratory Tests

- Blood tests may be used to rule out other medical causes of cognitive symptoms.

Imaging Studies

- Brain imaging such as MRI or CT scans to evaluate structural brain changes related to past injuries.

Planning for the Future

Healthcare Planning

- Maintain regular neurological and medical follow-up
- Use cognitive support strategies such as reminders and routines
- Address sleep, mood, and pain problems promptly

Legal & Financial Planning

- Ensure healthcare directives and power of attorney documents are updated
- Plan for supportive services if cognitive symptoms progress

Support for Caregivers

- Encourage structured daily routines
- Support use of memory aids such as calendars or reminders
- Monitor for mood changes or behavioral concerns
- Seek professional guidance when needed

National Organizations & Resources

✓ Brain Injury Association of America

🌐 biausa.org

✓ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – TBI Resources

🌐 cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury

✓ National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS)

☎ 800-352-9424 | 🌐 ninds.nih.gov

✓ Eldercare Locator

☎ 1-800-677-1116 | 🌐 eldercare.acl.gov

Final Notes

- Cognitive symptoms can sometimes appear long after a traumatic brain injury.
- Early recognition and supportive care can improve daily functioning and quality of life.
- Rehabilitation, medical care, and family support all play important roles in long-term recovery.