

Traumatic Brain Injury

A traumatic brain injury can affect a child in several ways. Your child may have a few, many or none of these effects. Here are answers to many of the questions that parents ask.

Behavior

Changes in a child's behavior are common after a head injury. At times your child may "act out," be irritable (cranky) or seem confused. He or she may seem depressed and may need counseling. Some children need to take medicine to help control emotions or behavior.

Children often tire easily after brain injuries. This includes both physical and mental fatigue. Your child's judgment and safety awareness may not be as good.

Attention Span and Memory

After a brain injury children often have trouble paying attention or concentrating. They may get distracted easily. You can help by trying to make sure they have few distractions at home. For example, try to provide a quiet area for homework and study. Keep the TV and radio off when your child is doing other tasks. Having a set schedule or daily routine can help also.

It is common for a child to have memory problems and trouble learning new things. Your child's safety awareness may be poor. For this reason, it may not be safe to leave your child alone.

Please refer to your doctor's specific advice for help with behavior issues.

Headaches

Some children complain of headaches after a head injury. These usually improve with time and may be treated with Tylenol®. However, if the headaches are getting worse and the child is clumsy or confused, the doctor should be called.

Activity

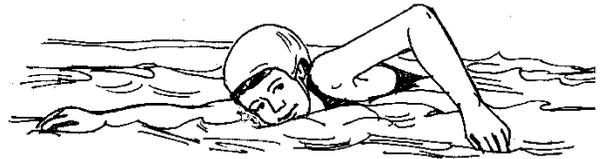
Exercise is important for all children. Your child's age and physical abilities must be considered when choosing the kind of activities they may do. Encourage your child to take part in activities that do not involve physical contact or running into another child (Picture 1).

Examples of **approved activities** include:

- Tennis, jogging, running
- Weight lifting
- Archery
- Swimming
- Floor exercise, riding stationary exercise bikes, aerobics
- Dancing

Examples of activities that are **not approved** include:

- Football, soccer, basketball, volleyball, rugby, boxing and other contact sports.
- Diving is not allowed but jumping feet-first into water is okay.
- Baseball and softball may be played as long as a **batting helmet is worn at all times**. Your child should play outfield when on defense, not pitcher or catcher.
- If your child is otherwise able to ride a bike, he may do so with a helmet, but first check with the physical therapist.
- Therapeutic horseback riding programs are safe and enjoyable. However, other horseback riding is not recommended.
- Unless the doctor approves, your child **should not** operate any motor vehicles. This includes ATVs, motorcycles, motor scooters, snowmobiles or automobiles.
- Amusement park rides are okay if you follow the doctor's advice for roller coaster rides. Some roller coasters can be dangerous for your child.



Medicines

Your child's injury may change the way he responds to medicines. Over-the-counter and prescription drugs may affect your child differently than they did before the injury. This is especially true of drugs that make him drowsy.

Some children may have slurred speech or seem confused or sleepy for a while after taking the medicine.

Picture 1 Your child can enjoy activities that don't involve physical contact.

Try to avoid giving new medicines when your child must be at his best, such as the night before a big test. Instead, give a new medicine only when you can watch your child closely for side effects. Once you have given a new medicine and there have been no unwanted side effects, it should be safe to give in the future.

Alcohol and Other Drugs

Brain injuries may increase the risk of seizures (convulsions or fits). Alcohol, drugs and smoking may increase the risk even more. Your child may be more sensitive to the effects of alcohol. He may get "drunk" or ill with smaller than usual amounts. When used as directed, the amount of alcohol in cough or cold syrups is safe.

When to Call the Doctor

Call your child's doctor, nurse or physical therapist if any of these things occur:

- Headaches that seem to be getting worse
- Child acts confused or clumsy (more than before the head injury).
- Problems with medication.

Follow Up and Support

After a brain injury, a child is somewhat more likely to have a second brain injury. To protect against this, it is important to use common sense and be aware of safety measures. Safety belts should always be used. Care must be taken to avoid high risk behaviors and situations.

The local head injury foundations can provide very helpful support for you, your child and your family. They can help with issues like funding sources and education. The Brain Injury Association of Ohio's phone number is (614) 481-7100. The organization website is www.biaoh.org.