

Weight Loss After Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

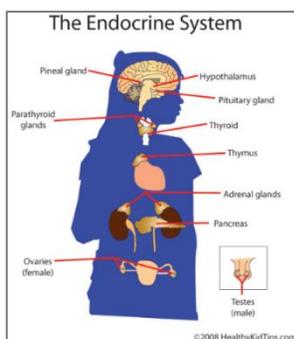
INTRODUCTION

After TBI, people may gain weight for many reasons, some of which may be related to their brain injury. In fact, research shows that up to 70% of TBI survivors become overweight or obese within ten years of their injury. While physical activity and healthy eating are key to weight loss and lowering symptoms such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease, it is important to know the potential barriers when starting on a weight loss and healthy lifestyle journey.



ENODOCRINE DYSFUNCTION

Endocrine dysfunction is the decreased function of your body's endocrine system (or system that secretes hormones). The endocrine system is made up of many glands and organs in your body. TBI may affect the glands within the brain. Furthermore, some hormones that are affected may alter how hungry you feel throughout the day. Symptoms may include:



- Depression
- Anxiety
- Tiredness
- Loss of muscle mass
- Weight gain or loss
- Increased belly fat

It is important to talk to your doctor if you have these symptoms or would like more information on endocrine dysfunction.

Resources:

- <https://tbi.cemmlibrary.org/Moderate-to-Severe-TBI/Secondary-Complications/Endocrine-Problems>
- <https://www.hormone.org/diseases-and-conditions/pituitary/traumatic-brain-injury>

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION

Executive function refers to the skills and abilities that allow people to achieve tasks. It involves planning, starting, doing, thinking about, and improving at a task. For people with a TBI, these may be impaired. A great example is going grocery shopping for healthy foods, but leaving your wallet at home. While this can happen to anyone, it may happen more often for people with a TBI. Being aware of this and use the below ideas to help.

- Using planners or organizers
- Making checklists
- Setting alarm reminders
- Breaking down activities into smaller steps
- Keeping all items that you need to take with you (ex: wallet, keys, phone) in a “memory station” at home, such as an entry table by the door



Resources:

- <https://msktc.org/tbi/factsheets/Cognitive-Problems-After-Traumatic-Brain-Injury>
- <https://msktc.org/tbi/factsheets/memory-and-traumatic-brain-injury>

EMOTIONAL FUNCTION

TBI can change the way a person feels or expresses emotion. Signs may include

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Temper outbursts
- Irritability

These may all effect a person’s motivation or desire to continue a weight loss and healthy lifestyle journey. It is important to speak to your doctor or psychologist if you experience any of these problems, as interventions and treatments do exist.



Peer groups are also a great way to find support and seek suggestions. For more information, as well as support groups in North Texas, please visit the websites below.

Resources:

- <https://msktc.org/tbi/factsheets/emotional-problems-after-traumatic-brain-injury>
- <https://msktc.org/tbi/factsheets/depression-after-traumatic-brain-injury>
- <http://synapse.org.au/information-services/mental-health-depression-brain-injury.aspx>
- <https://hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/office-acquired-brain-injury/support-groups-texas>

BALANCE PROBLEMS

People with TBI commonly report problems with balance. Balance issues are very important to address before you increase your activity level. Balance problems can be caused by

- Medications
- Blood pressure
- Vision impairments
- Damage to certain areas of the brain

It is important to talk to your doctor, physical and occupational therapists, or other health care providers if you experience balance issues. For more information on balance and ways to improve balance, please visit the websites below.



Resources:

- <https://msktc.org/tbi/factsheets/Balance-Problems-After-Traumatic-Brain-Injury>
- <https://go4life.nia.nih.gov/exercises/balance>

SLEEP AND FATIGUE

As many as 70% of TBI survivors complain of fatigue and tiredness. Such issues can affect stress levels, and motivation to eat healthy or be active, and overall well-being. Ways to improve sleep and fatigue include



- Decreasing caffeine intake
- Avoiding alcohol and drugs
- Setting a regular daily schedule
- Getting outdoors
- Avoiding naps longer than 20 minutes

If you experience prolonged problems with sleep or fatigue, talk to your doctor to explore safe and effective solutions. For more information, please visit the websites below.

Resources:

- <https://msktc.org/tbi/factsheets/fatigue-and-traumatic-brain-injury>
- <https://msktc.org/tbi/factsheets/sleep-and-traumatic-brain-injury>

ALCOHOL USE

It is strongly recommended for persons with TBI to avoid drinking alcohol. Alcohol not only adds excess calories, but also may

- Affect recovery
- Increase the risk of developing seizures
- Increase the risk of having another brain injury
- Affect mental functioning and mood
- Cause dangerous side-effects if taken with certain prescription medications

For more information on alcohol use following TBI and ways to change, cut down, or stop drinking, please visit the website below.

Resources:

- <https://msktc.org/tbi/factsheets/Alcohol-Use-After-Traumatic-Brain-Injury#fsmenu1>
- <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/sa/OSAR/>

HUNGER AND YOUR SENSES

TBI can change how you taste and smell food. You may not smell or taste foods the same way (or at all) that you did before your injury. As part of your TBI you may also crave certain types of foods that you didn't crave before your injury (some healthy and some not). Below are some ways to help with this.

- Use a diary to write down how certain foods tasted before your injury
- Cook with a variety of colorful foods and textures
- Add herbs to your food instead of salt and sugar
- Use color labels for foods (for example, a green sticker can mean "healthy," a yellow sticker can mean "less healthy," and a red sticker can mean "not healthy")
- Try to eat the foods with green labels more often or have them in the front of your pantry or refrigerator
- Avoid eating foods with red labels



MEMORY

Memory problems are very common in people after TBI. Sometimes people report not being able to remember if or when they last ate and don't feel full after eating. These can all make it harder to eat healthy and live a healthy lifestyle, though there are steps one can take to help.



- Keep a log on the refrigerator with the times that you eat throughout the day
- Use cues or labels to remember where certain healthy foods are located in your kitchen
- Set a timer on your phone or clock to remind you when to eat
- Keep healthy menus on the inside of your cabinet doors or in a book on your counter top
- Make a daily calendar of important events for the day and make sure to leave time to eat and prepare a healthy meal

Talk with your family and friends to think of ways you can work together to help you with your memory. If you need other ideas, you can always talk to your doctor or health coach for more options. More information on memory after TBI can be found in the websites below.

Resources:

- <https://msktc.org/tbi/factsheets/memory-and-traumatic-brain-injury>
- <https://www.brainline.org/article/memory-and-brain-injury>

MEDICATIONS

Some medications prescribed to you by your doctor may affect your weight loss journey or activity levels.



Before beginning any weight loss program, you should speak to your doctor and make sure that starting such a journey is safe.

You can also use this time to discuss your current medications and their side effects. Medications are very important and should not be stopped without the advice of your doctor. Your doctor may be able to help with the effects of the medication or suggest ways for you to work around the effects.

DISCLAIMER

This information is not meant to replace the advice from a medical professional. You should consult your health care provider before embarking on any weight loss and healthy lifestyle journey.