



# Invisible Injuries

When You've Been  
Strangled or Hurt in the  
Head, Neck, or Face



**The Center on  
Partner-Inflicted  
Brain Injury**

This information is for learning and awareness only and does not diagnose brain injuries. If you think you may have a brain injury, talk to a medical professional.

# Welcome!

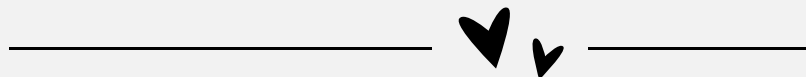
We are glad you found this resource and hope it brings you knowledge, support, and healing.



When someone hurts you, it can have a big impact on your life, both now and in the future. It can make you feel physically and emotionally unsafe and cause trauma reactions.

While many things can cause trauma, this booklet focuses on what happens when someone strangles you, or hurts you in the head, neck, or face. This type of violence can cause brain injury.

We are sorry you were hurt. It's not your fault. People care about you and want to help you on your journey to safety.



**Brain injuries are often invisible, but still can affect your life every day.**

# Trauma and Violence

Trauma is an event or series of events that turn your world upside down. It can leave your brain overwhelmed and struggling to make sense of what happened and how to cope.

**After experiencing violence, it's normal to have strong reactions, including...**

Feeling worried or on edge much of the time.

Having trouble sleeping or waking from bad dreams.

Feeling numb or detached from emotions or surroundings.

Difficulty trusting others, even those trying to help.

Experiencing upsetting memories or flashbacks.

Easily startled by loud noises or sudden movements.

Having trouble focusing or making decisions.

Avoiding places or people that remind you of the abuse.

Feeling angry or irritated, even if you don't know why.

**These feelings are your body and mind's way of protecting you. You are not alone. With support, things can get better over time.**

# What is Brain Injury?

A traumatic brain injury (TBI), also known as concussion, happens when a force to the head disrupts how the brain normally works. Anoxic or hypoxic brain injuries happen when the brain doesn't get enough oxygen or blood, often from pressure on the neck that blocks breathing or circulation. Brain injuries can also be caused by shaking or whiplash type injuries, even when your head isn't actually hurt.

## What can cause a brain injury?

- ◆ Hits to the head or face
- ◆ Strangulation
- ◆ Choking
- ◆ Being shaken severely
- ◆ Suffocation
- ◆ Drug overdose
- ◆ Drowning
- ◆ Losing consciousness
- ◆ Car crashes
- ◆ Falls or other accidents

**Sometimes the effect of brain injury are not recognized until later.**

Identifying brain injury early is key to healing. Brain injury can affect mental health and daily life, but many symptoms are treatable.

# Strangulation is a Dangerous and Deadly Crime

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Strangulation is serious and life-threatening. Just one incident increases the risk of you being severely hurt again or killed by 7.5 times. That risk increases even more if it happens more than once.

Contact an advocate at a local domestic violence program to develop a personalized safety plan with support, guidance, and referrals.

**Ask yourself these questions to start assessing your risk:**

Has the abuse become more severe or frequent?

Do they have access to weapons or made threats to use or get one?

Have they tried or threatened to kill me, my children, themselves, or others?

Do they control or monitor my activities or location?

**When you are hurt repeatedly, you are more likely to have a brain injury that can cause problems.**

# Safety Tips

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**If you are in immediate danger, call 911.**

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- ◆ Do what feels safest to avoid violence— this might mean stepping away or going along with demands in the moment.
- ◆ Protect your head, neck, and face from further injury.
- ◆ Stay with someone safe for one to three days and note any concerning changes.
- ◆ If you were hurt in the head, neck, or face, watch for signs of brain injury and seek medical care.
- ◆ Watch for changes in your body, mood, thoughts, or relationships. Ask a trusted person if they notice anything and share concerns with a doctor, therapist, or advocate.
- ◆ Seek out safety and support from an advocate at your local domestic violence agency.

**Trust your instincts. Your safety is a priority.  
Create a safety plan.**

# Get Medical Care if You were Hurt in the Head, Neck, or Face

Tell your doctor you were hurt in the head, neck, or face, including strangulation. You don't have to have any bruises or swelling for your brain to be hurt. Get medical care if anything worries you or someone else, or you think something happened to you while you were unconscious.

## Warning Signs for Immediate Medical Care

- Difficult or painful breathing
- Problems speaking or swallowing
- Vomiting or nausea
- Shaking, twitching, seizures
- Confusion or agitation
- Unconsciousness
- Severe headaches
- Decreased coordination
- Unusual behavior
- Drowsy, difficulty waking up
- Urination or defecation during assault



**If you have any of these signs or symptoms, seek medical attention immediately – your health and safety could be at risk.**

# Stay with Someone Safe & Watch for Signs & Symptoms

Concerning symptoms may be delayed and can include:

- Mood, personality, or behavior changes
- Confusion or cognitive issues
- Balance problems or dizziness
- Visible petechiae or small red dots on face, neck, or eyes
- Noticeable changes or an increase in signs and symptoms

## Persisting Symptoms After Concussion or Brain Injury

While there is no timeline for healing, sometimes symptoms from a brain injury last longer than expected. When symptoms continue for several weeks or months or aren't getting better—especially longer than three months—this is often called persisting symptoms after concussion.

Healing looks different for everyone. If symptoms are still affecting you, a healthcare provider can help with evaluation and treatment. Many symptoms can improve with care.

# Changes After Brain Injury

After a head injury, you might notice changes in your thoughts, feelings, body, or behavior.

It can help knowing which words or language to use to describe a feeling/symptom to someone safe or to share with your doctor. Share these concerns with your doctor, especially if symptoms persist longer than three months.

## Physical

- Headaches
- Sleep problems
- Dizziness
- Balance problems
- Fatigue
- Seizures
- Sensitive to light or noise

## Thinking

- Remembering things
- Understanding things
- Paying attention or focusing
- Following directions
- Getting things started
- Figuring out what to do next
- Organizing things
- Controlling emotions or reactions

## Emotions

- Worries and fears
- Panic attacks
- Flashbacks
- Sadness
- Depression
- Hopelessness
- Anger or rage
- Irritability

This symptom list is not exhaustive—you might experience some, not all, or a mix, and maybe something that is not listed.



# Head Injury Self-Care Tips

## Rest & Sleep

Try breathing exercises, meditation, or grounding to lower stress. Aim for a regular sleep routine and take breaks as needed—your body and brain work best when well-rested.

## Limit Screen Time

Ease back into activities slowly. Increase screen use and other tasks gradually, and only if they don't make symptoms worse. Let your brain and body adjust at their own pace.

## Watch for Changes

Pay attention to any changes in your body, mood, thinking, or relationships. Ask someone you trust if they've noticed anything different or concerning.

## Manage Symptoms

Headaches, sleep issues, dizziness, and sensitivity to light or noise are common after a head injury. Light exercise may help. Talk to a doctor for a care plan that works for you.

## Stay Safe

Healing takes time, and more harm can make things worse. Find ways to protect your head, neck, and face from any new injuries.

## Be Patient

Brain injuries are unique, and the brain needs time to heal. Pay attention to what helps you feel better and celebrate small steps forward.

# Strategies to Address Impact of Domestic Violence



## 1 Nightmares, Flashbacks, Anxiety

- Focus on your breath; slow breathing helps calm your body and mind.
- Engage in an activity you like to take your mind off stress, like music, walking, or art.
- Talk to someone for support.
- Understanding trauma and ways to relax can help you heal.

## 2 Memory, Planning, Organizing

- Use tools to stay organized and keep track of what matters, like writing to-do lists, using a calendar, or saving important numbers in your phone or a notebook.
- Designate a central spot for important items like your phone, keys, or glasses.
- Follow a routine and come up with associations, like always take medication with breakfast, or always check appliances before bed.
- Use a timer or alarm to get started and work for a set time.
- Take frequent breaks, especially if you feel frustrated.



Your brain may work differently after trauma, and that's okay. Tools like planners, alarms, and checklists can make things feel more manageable—you're not failing, you're adapting.

# Strategies to Address Impact of Domestic Violence



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## Sensitive to light or sound, vision problems

- Use earplugs, headphones, sunglasses, or adjust lighting.
- Adjust text size and volume settings on your technology.
- Contact an eye doctor if vision problems persist.
- Reduce screen time.
- Take frequent breaks.
- Work where it is quiet with minimal distractions.

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## Neurofatigue, or “brain fog”

- Ask people to speak slowly.
- Pace yourself and split tasks into chunks.
- Schedule things according to your energy level.
- Have shorter meetings, activities, or conversations.
- Write down thoughts and ideas and share them with someone you trust.
- Focus on one thing at a time.
- Learn to recognize early signs of fatigue and stop activities before they become overwhelming.



Using strategies to help your brain—like notes, reminders, or routines—is a sign of strength, not weakness. These tools support your healing and help you manage daily life more easily.

# My Self-Advocacy and Support Plan

Identifying strategies (things you can do to work around a challenge) and accommodations (changes other people can make to better support you) can help make day-to-day life feel more manageable.

Common challenges include memory, concentration, headaches, fatigue, emotions, sleep, communication, sensory overload, decision-making, balance, and pain. Many of these issues are treatable and can be addressed once we are aware of them.

You can identify challenges below and ways to address them.

My most significant concern: \_\_\_\_\_

What I'm proud of and do well: \_\_\_\_\_

What is most important to me: \_\_\_\_\_

|   |   |   |  |               |                    |
|---|---|---|--|---------------|--------------------|
| <p><b>Challenge:</b> Remembering things that just happened</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>I can:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write notes in my phone</li> <li>Put appointments in a calendar</li> <li>Let other know I have trouble with memory</li> </ul> </td> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Others can:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review important information with me</li> <li>Remind me to check my notes</li> <li>Be patient</li> </ul> </td> </tr> </table> | <p><b>I can:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write notes in my phone</li> <li>Put appointments in a calendar</li> <li>Let other know I have trouble with memory</li> </ul> | <p><b>Others can:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review important information with me</li> <li>Remind me to check my notes</li> <li>Be patient</li> </ul> | <p><b>Challenge:</b></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"><b>I can:</b></td> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"><b>Others can:</b></td> </tr> </table> | <b>I can:</b> | <b>Others can:</b> |
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| <b>I can:</b>   | <b>Others can:</b>  |   |  |               |                    |
| <b>I can:</b>   | <b>Others can:</b>  |   |  |               |                    |

**Other things to consider:**

- Times of the day that are harder for me: \_\_\_\_\_
- Things that make my symptoms worse: \_\_\_\_\_
- Things that help me feel calmer or more focused: \_\_\_\_\_
- Signs I may need a break or extra support: \_\_\_\_\_
- Notes, reminders, or plans to follow up about anything above: \_\_\_\_\_

# Ways to Support Your Brain Health



- 1 Consistent Sleep Schedule**—regular, restful sleep is essential for brain healing. Take breaks during the day.
- 2 Eat a Brain Healthy Diet**—Drink plenty of water and focus on whole grains, nuts, fruits and veggies.
- 3 Move Your Body**—Gentle movement like walking, stretching, or yoga can increase blood flow to the brain.
- 4 Monitor Mental Health**—Check in with yourself and monitor what’s normal for you. Share these patterns with a doctor or therapist.
- 5 Protect Yourself from Injury**—Stay away from people or places that put your safety at risk. Your safety and peace are key to long-term healing.

Supporting your brain after an injury means giving it what it needs to heal and stay safe. Healing takes time. You deserve care, support, and a future free from harm.

# Ways to Support Your Brain Health



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**Stay Mentally Active**—Simple, brain friendly activities help rebuild brain connections, supports memory, and sharpens thinking skills.

7

**Reduce Chronic Stress**—Have a daily routine that feels safe and predictable. Use calming tools and learn grounding techniques.

8

**Make Social Connections**—Being around safe, supportive people can lower stress and improve thinking, memory, and mood.

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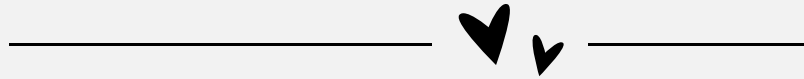
**Avoid Harmful Substances**—They can worsen memory, focus, sleep, and mood.

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**Manage Chronic Health Conditions**—Taking care of your whole body supports clear thinking and emotional balance.

Caring for your brain is an act of strength. Rest, routine, and connection support healing and help you feel like yourself again—you're worth it.

# Healing from Head Injury and Trauma

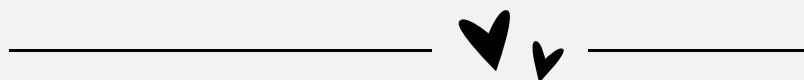


Healing is possible. Surviving abuse takes strength. With time and support, you can heal. You deserve safety, health, and a full life of happiness.

Abuse can affect your body, mind, and daily life—like your health, housing, or finances. Getting support for these things can help you move forward.

Reaching out takes courage, and you are not alone. People care. Advocates, doctors, and therapists are available to help you heal.

**It's not your fault you were hurt. Healing is possible.  
Help is available.**



# Important Contacts and Safety Planning

My Local Domestic Violence/Sexual Violence Program

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My Advocate

---

Things that Make Me Feel Safer

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Nearest Medical Provider

---

Upcoming Appointments

---

**National Domestic Violence Hotline:**

Call 1.800.799.SAFE (7233) or Text START to 88788.

Free, confidential support, 24/7.

**Brain Injury Association of Ohio Helpline:**

Looking for help and hope on your brain injury journey?

Call the Helpline at 833-783-1495.

# Daily Planner

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Day \_\_\_\_\_

## To Do List

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Don't Forget

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Important

- ★ \_\_\_\_\_
- ★ \_\_\_\_\_
- ★ \_\_\_\_\_

## Self-Care Goals

- ♥ Drink water
- ♥ Get good sleep
- ♥ \_\_\_\_\_

## **Violence causes brain injuries and concussions.**

### **Did you know?**

- Brain injury symptoms are often mistaken for mental health issues and missed.
- It is never too late to address a brain injury.
- Many brain injury symptoms are treatable!



Scan for More Information.



**The Center on  
Partner-Inflicted  
Brain Injury**

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