



University
Hospitals Sussex
NHS Foundation Trust

Inpatient information following head injury

Patient information

What is this information about?

This information is about what to expect during your hospital stay following a head injury, how to support your recovery at home, and where to find help if you need it.

It includes:

- what happens during admission
- support you might receive from different specialists
- what to expect in your recovery
- common symptoms to look out for
- discharge and returning to daily activities
- when to seek further medical help
- who to contact for ongoing support.

What will happen when I arrive at hospital?

When you arrive at hospital, healthcare staff will assess your condition. This may include:

- a physical examination
- neurological assessment
- a CT scan or MRI to check for any brain injury.

How long will I stay in hospital?

The length of your hospital stay depends on the severity of your injury and your individual recovery needs. Some people may go home after a few days; others might need longer treatment or monitoring.

Your healthcare team will regularly review your progress and update you on your discharge plan.

Who might be involved in my care?

You may see several specialists while in hospital, depending on how your head injury has affected you.

These can include:

- **Doctors and nurses:** monitor your symptoms, vital signs, and manage your treatment
- **Head injury nurse:** a specialist nurse who supports you and your family, manages neurological symptoms, and helps with your recovery plan
- **Occupational Therapist (OT):** helps assess memory, attention, and how your injury affects daily tasks like dressing or cooking
- **Physiotherapist:** supports your mobility and strength, may assess your balance
- **Speech and Language Therapist (SALT):** helps with communication, speech, and swallowing difficulties
- **Dietitian:** advises on nutrition to support healing and manage dietary needs
- **Rehabilitation coordinator:** helps plan your next steps if you need continued rehab after discharge
- **Trauma psychologist:** offers support for emotional and psychological challenges due to the injury
- **Neuropsychologist:** assesses cognitive functioning and supports with behavioural or capacity concerns
- **Major Trauma Signposting Team (MTSP):** supports you and your family with non-medical concerns like housing, benefits, and legal advice.

What symptoms might I experience after leaving hospital?

It's normal to have symptoms that last for weeks or months after a head injury. These might include physical, cognitive and emotional symptoms.

Physical symptoms

Fatigue

Tiredness is very common after a brain injury and can be overwhelming. Pace yourself with short activities followed by rest. Increase activity gradually recovery time varies for each person. Overdoing it can worsen headaches and make thinking harder.

Dizziness

You may feel dizzy or have vertigo due to balance issues in the inner ear. This usually improves within 2–3 weeks. If not, an ENT referral may be needed. Treatment is often effective.

Sleep Problems

Despite daytime tiredness, sleeping at night can be difficult. Good sleep is vital for healing. Start by following ‘sleep hygiene’ tips (available online or from your nurse). If sleep issues continue, speak to your nurse or GP.

Epilepsy

Brain injury can increase the risk of seizures. You may be prescribed antiepileptic medication short- or long-term. Seizures at the time of injury are common and usually require treatment. Do not fly for two months after injury, even without seizures.

Hormone Imbalance

Damage to hormone-regulating areas of the brain may cause fatigue, low sex drive, headaches, mood changes, irregular periods, and more. These symptoms can appear weeks or months later. Blood tests can confirm the diagnosis, and medication may help.

Vision Problems

Blurred or double vision can occur and often improves within weeks. Some cases may need specialist care. Light sensitivity (photophobia) is also common—limit exposure to bright lights if needed.

Cognitive symptoms

Common cognitive effects which may occur following brain injury are:

- reduction in short term memory
- slower thought processing, this often improves with time
- reduced concentration span
- impaired reasoning
- lack of insight
- problems with language skills (word finding difficulties, repetition)
- reduced problem solving
- difficulties.

Sometimes it is difficult for you to recognise these symptoms in yourself, and it may be more apparent to family members or nursing staff.

Before you leave hospital, you should have been asked to participate in a cognitive assessment with an occupational therapist or head injury nurse specialist.

Depending on the result of this test you may be asked to see a neuropsychologist for a more in-depth test of your cognitive function.

These tests are designed to highlight any cognitive deficits or issues you may have so that we can work with you to minimize these effects or refer you on to either inpatient or community rehabilitation teams.

Emotional symptoms

Mood swings or anxiety

Feeling low, irritable or tearful is common. Talk to speak to your head injury nurse, if it persists, who can direct you to counselling and support groups. In some cases, mood stabilizing medication may need to be taken for a short period.

Sensory overload

Noisy, chaotic environments may be too much at first. Take breaks in quiet spaces. This feeling of being overwhelmed by sensory input should improve over time.

What should I know about driving after a head injury?

You must not drive until fully recovered.

If your brain scan showed bleeding, bruising or you had surgery or seizures, you must:

- Notify the DVLA by completing form B1 (available online or at the Post Office)
- Inform your insurance company.

The DVLA will then contact your consultant for advice on your injury and they will then advise you on when you may start driving again.

You may be banned from driving for 6 months or more, depending on the severity of your injury.

This is decided by the DVLA, not the hospital.

Please note that it is your responsibility to inform the DVLA of your head injury, this is not something that the hospital staff will do on your behalf.

Failure to notify them will result in a fine.

Contact:

DVLA Medical Enquiries **0300 790 6806**

Gov uk www.gov.uk/driving-medical-conditions

When can I return to work?

Do not return until you feel fully ready. A phased return may be needed; your head injury nurse can help by speaking to your employer if necessary.

Can I return to sports or education?

Contact sports must be avoided. Follow your head injury nurse's or sport governing body's advice.

You may need time off or extra exam support.
Tutors can be informed by your nurse.

Can I drink alcohol or use recreational drugs?

No. Avoid both until fully recovered.

Alcohol or drugs:

- can worsen symptoms
- affect memory and decision-making
- interact negatively with medications (especially antiepileptic drugs)
- may increase seizure risk.

What happens if I leave hospital before a specialist has seen me?

Some teams do not work weekends or may have delays.
If doctors say you're medically safe to leave, **you can choose to go**, but please note:

- you may miss important specialist assessments or referrals
- underlying conditions might be overlooked
- medication or rehab planning may be incomplete
- your recovery could be affected.

This falls under the **Mental Capacity Act**, and you may be assessed to make sure you understand the risks before choosing early discharge.

What if I need more support or have questions after going home?

Contact your Head Injury Nurse

If you were seen by them during your admission, you'll get a follow-up appointment.

You can also contact them directly:

Royal Sussex County Hospital 07788 398209 / 07788 398209

Head.injury@nhs.net

Major Trauma Signposting Partnership (MTSP)

Support with housing, benefits, legal aid, and more

03300 432839 uhsussex.mtsp@nhs.net

<https://mtsp.info/>

Headway – Brain Injury Association

Support groups, helplines, and resources for people and families

0808 800 2244

helpline@headway.org.uk

www.headway.org.uk/

Go to A&E or call 999

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