

🧑 Effect on others

When someone has a brain injury, it can affect others close to them as well.

It can be hard emotionally watching someone close to you experience the physical, mental and emotional difficulties that often follow a brain injury. Also, at times it may seem as if the injured person's personality has changed, and this can put stress on relationships.

The important thing is to know that help is available to deal with issues such as these – see the details on 'Where to go for help'.

🧑 Where to go for help

If you think you or someone close to you has a brain injury, get medical advice as soon as possible. In the first instance, see your GP. Your GP can also help you make a claim with ACC.

Other help and information about brain injury is available from Brain Injury New Zealand. The association has branches throughout New Zealand and can help with:

- support for you and your family
- education and information
- help to find appropriate professional assistance and services
- advocacy and liaison with ACC, insurers, the healthcare system and other agencies.

🧑 Contact:

Brain Injury New Zealand

North Shore Life Centre
3 William Laurie Place
PO Box 301 583, Albany
North Shore 0752
Auckland

Phone: 0508 1 BRAIN (0508 1 27246)
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Understanding Brain Injury



Every day **90**
New Zealanders
sustain a brain injury



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Understanding brain injury

- In New Zealand, around 90 people sustain a brain injury every day.
- The impact of this can be significant – not just on the person with the injury, but on friends, family and loved ones too.
- This brochure explains a bit more about brain injury – how it happens, what the effects can be, and what support is available.
- If you have sustained a brain injury, it's important to know that you're not alone and help is at hand if you need it.

The brain is the control centre of the body. Different parts of the brain control different functions such as emotions, thinking, sensations, alertness, movement and breathing.

What is brain injury?

A brain injury occurs when brain cells or the pathways that connect them become damaged or die. This can cause many kinds of physical, mental and emotional problems. As different parts of the brain control different functions, the effect of a brain injury will depend on which area of the brain has been affected.

Brain injuries can range from mild to severe, depending on how many cells are affected, and how badly damaged they are. A mild brain injury is commonly known as a concussion.

How do brain injuries happen?

A traumatic brain injury results from a sudden knock or bump to the head.

Common causes include motor vehicle crashes, falls, sporting injuries and assaults. "Traumatic" relates to how the injury happened, and doesn't refer to the severity of the injury.

Brain injury can also result from strokes, infections such as meningitis, brain tumours and 'neurotoxic disorders' (which include poisoning by drugs, alcohol, gases, solvents and pesticides).

What is the effect of a brain injury?

Brain injury is often called a 'hidden injury' because often there are no visible changes to a person after a brain injury. Despite this, a brain injury can result in any of the following:

- **Fatigue (tiredness):** this is the most common effect of a brain injury. Often the fatigue is connected more with mental tasks than physical tasks, a 'tired mind rather than a tired body'.
- **Physical problems:** headaches, dizziness and nausea (feeling sick) are common physical effects, as is difficulty moving and walking, and sensitivity to light and noise.
- **Problems with memory and thinking:** all mental tasks can be affected, but in particular trouble with concentrating, organising, planning and making decisions.
- **Emotional and behavioural problems:** anxiety, depression, anger and irritability are common following a traumatic brain injury. A person with a brain injury may also start being impulsive and say or do inappropriate things, such as swearing, talking too loudly or standing too close to someone.

- **Job impacts:** this might range from disruption of work habits to job loss.
- **Social interaction:** there may be difficulty relating with family and friends.

What's the outlook?

The effects of a mild injury may disappear over time. A severe injury can result in a permanent disability that requires life-long care and rehabilitation.

Often, it's hard to predict what the outcome will be at the time of injury. This is because the impact of the injury, and the time it takes to recover, are usually different for each person.

One reason for this is the way the brain responds to injury. Damaged brain cells are unlikely to recover – but other parts of the brain may be able to carry out some of the functions of the damaged area. Whether this happens, though, and how quickly, is very much a matter of time.

