

## March is Brain Injury Awareness Month

This year, the Department of Defense is recognizing Brain Injury Awareness month by focusing on the advancement of warfighter brain health. Commanders can show their continued commitment to promoting and protecting the health and well-being of our nation's warfighters by knowing the signs and symptoms of a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

A Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) can happen to any of our Airmen at any time. TBI is a significant health condition that can affect the readiness of our Total Force. While 85-95% of people recover from a mild TBI within days or weeks<sup>1</sup>, those with a moderate to severe TBI or multiple mild TBIs experience varied recoveries.<sup>2</sup> Since a brain injury is an invisible wound, there are no outward physical markers that allow for visible detection. Pay attention to common symptoms after a brain injury, such as headaches, dizziness, memory loss, personality changes, forgetfulness, and confusion. Should your Airmen experience a TBI, encourage them to consult their physician before returning to duty and inform them of the [available resources](#).

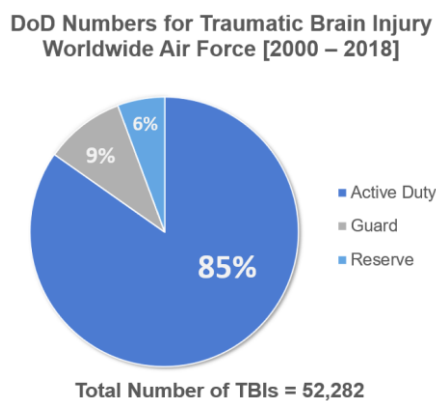
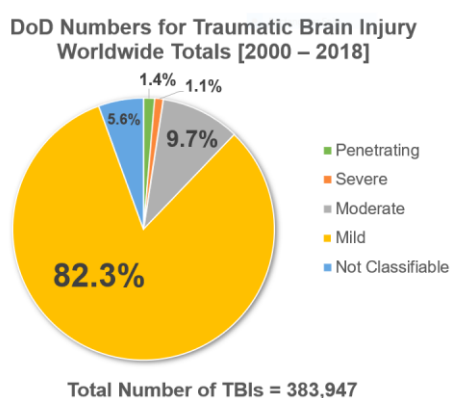
After an injury, and once an Airman has been cleared by a medical provider, Commanders should keep in mind that recovery will be different for each Airman. Depending on the nature and severity of the injury, returning to duty too soon may cause symptoms to recur or worsen.

To ensure Airmen are fit to return to duty, Commanders need to be aware of the following:

- Symptoms after a concussion can affect performance and put an Airman and/or their fellow Wingmen in danger
- Temporary symptoms resolve faster when the brain gets rest, so it is important that Airmen take time to recover
- If the Airman sustains another concussion before healing from the first one, his or her recovery might be delayed<sup>3</sup>

## TBIs by the Numbers

Since the early 2000s and the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), the rates of TBI among military service members has increased drastically. To date, the Air Force represents approximately 14 percent of the DoD's total number of TBIs.



Source: <https://dvbic.dcoe.mil/dod-worldwide-numbers-tbi>

## Longitudinal Study on TBI and the Military

To address a 2008 Congressional mandate, the federal government is conducting a 15-year study on the effects of TBI on military service members with hopes to improve long-term care, rehabilitation programs, and services.<sup>4</sup> To date, the study has concluded the following:

- Post-traumatic stress disorder, acute stress, depression, and sleep disruption complicate TBI recovery and impact prognosis
- Women and men have different patterns of presentation and recovery after a TBI. Research shows that women take longer to recover from a TBI and are more likely to report their symptoms
- Airmen should receive comprehensive, integrated medical care, including mental health care to address changing needs throughout the continuum of care

To ensure our Airmen with invisible wounds are supported in their road to recovery, Commanders should reinforce the importance of getting an appropriate amount of sleep, allowing the brain to repair and recharge.

For more tips on how to support our Airmen who have sustained a TBI, check out the 'Did You Know?' section on the right panel.

## Did You Know?



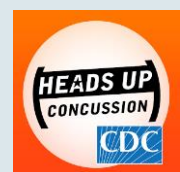
Most Airmen who sustain a mild traumatic brain injury/concussion recover completely within days or weeks. Service members who sustain a brain injury should be able to return to duty when they are free of symptoms, have finished their recovery period, and have been cleared by their medical provider.

- Commanders can help service members return to duty faster by encouraging the following behaviors:
  - Drink lots of water
  - Take breaks
  - Do not drink alcohol while recovering from a brain injury
  - Avoid caffeine
  - Refrain from physical work, heavy lifting, or exercise until cleared by a medical provider



**U.S. AIR FORCE**

Eglin Air Force Base's Invisible Wounds Center is now open, serving as a regional treatment center for TBI, as well as PTSD, related pain conditions, and psychological injuries.



**HEADS UP** is an awareness initiative started by the CDC. It aims to improve prevention, recognition, and response to concussion and other serious brain injuries. Check out these [free online courses](#) to learn more about concussions.

<sup>1</sup> Source: AF Wounded Warrior. (2019). Airman Care Map. Retrieved from: <https://www.woundedwarrior.af.mil/Airmen-Veterans/Invisible-Wounds-Initiative/>

<sup>2</sup> Source: Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center. TBI and the Military. Retrieved from: <https://dvbic.dcoe.mil/tbi-military>

<sup>3</sup> Source: Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center. Returning to Duty. Retrieved from: <https://dvbic.dcoe.mil/article/returning-duty>

<sup>4</sup> Source: Department of Defense. (2017) Longitudinal Study on Traumatic Brain Injury Incurred by Members of the Armed Forces in OIF and OEF. Retrieved from: <https://health.mil/Reference-Center/Reports/2017/07/19/Longitudinal-Study-on-Traumatic-Brain-Injury-Incurred-by-Members-of-the-Armed-Forces>