

Acquired brain injury (ABI)

What is an acquired brain injury?

An acquired brain injury is the result of damage that occurs to the brain several years after birth, and isn't related to a congenital disease (birth defect) or a degenerative disease, such as dementia. The damage may result in difficulties that could be temporary or permanent, and may result in disability, psychological or social problems.

What causes acquired brain injuries?

Acquired brain injuries can be caused by many different things, but can be broken down into the following broad categories:

- Trauma – a brain injury caused by an external force, such as a blow to the head
- Vascular – a brain injury caused by a stroke or a haemorrhage
- Hypoxic/Metabolic – a brain injury caused by the interruption of the oxygen or glucose supply to the brain, for example, after a heart attack or carbon monoxide poisoning
- Infective – a brain injury caused by an infection, such as meningitis or encephalitis
- Tumour – a brain injury caused by a brain tumour

The causes of acquired brain injuries can be very different, but often the symptoms people experience are very similar.

Who is affected by acquired brain injuries?

This varies according to the type of injury. Traumatic brain injuries are more common amongst children and young adults, and older adults. Vascular brain injuries are more common amongst middle-aged and older adults, with almost $\frac{1}{3}$ occurring under the age of 65 years. Roughly twice as many men as women suffer traumatic brain injuries, whereas vascular brain injuries tend to occur just as frequently in men and women.

Common symptoms after an acquired brain injury

Different people experience different symptoms after an acquired brain injury depending on which part of the brain has been damaged. Some common symptoms are listed in four categories below; but it is very unlikely that one person would suffer from all of these.

Physical

- Limb weakness
- Co-ordination difficulties
- Balance problems
- Visual difficulties
- Hearing loss
- Seizures
- Headaches
- Fatigue

Communication

- Difficulties using language to express themselves
- Difficulties understanding language

Cognitive

- Memory difficulties
- Attention difficulties
- Perceptual problems
- Problem-solving difficulties
- Slowed down processing of information
- Difficulties thinking flexibly or abstractly
- Lack of insight
- Difficulties understanding social situations

Emotional

- Mood swings
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Poor motivation
- Processing emotion

Some of these symptoms may improve naturally over time; however rehabilitation can help manage and treat others. Health professionals such as physiotherapists, clinical psychologists, speech and language therapists and occupational therapists are involved in rehabilitation.

Further information

For more information, please see the links at the side of the page to charities which all offer free publications which give information and advice on all types acquired brain injury.