



Prevention is Key to Traumatic Brain Injury *By Daniel Schlosser, MD*

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 5.3 million Americans are living with disabilities from brain trauma, resulting in more than 50,000 deaths per year. Acute brain injuries occur from many causes, but we will focus on Traumatic Brain injuries (TBI). These can happen to anyone, but those most at risk are males age 15 to 25 (generally due to sports and higher risk behaviors), and the elderly over age 75 (generally due to increased risk of falling, mostly at home).

Traumatic brain injuries (also referred to as “closed head injuries”) can cause a range of symptoms from minor disorientation that lasts only briefly, to concussions that can take weeks for symptoms to clear, to brain hemorrhages causing stroke like symptoms, or bleeding between the brain and skull bone called subdural hemorrhage. These effects can lead to long-term paralysis, long-term difficulties with speech/ learning or even persistent vegetative states, all depending on severity of

injury. Once these injuries occur, they are often permanent and recovery can be slow and prolonged. People may never return to their normal selves. So the main focus of “treatment” is PREVENTION!

Obviously, for younger folks, prevention is based on the activity, such as wearing seatbelts when driving, and appropriate safety gear such as helmets for sports, bicycling, motorcycles, skiing, snowboarding etc. And just because you don’t plan to play long, or to just take the new skateboard around the driveway, doesn’t mean an accident can’t happen in those brief moments, so ALWAYS wear your helmets.

Falls at home are a common cause of bone fractures and traumatic brain injuries. Risk for falls can increase for many reasons including general aging, neuropathy from underlying medical conditions, acute illness such as “flu” causing weakness, pain medication use, prior injuries or arthritis. Preventing falls at home requires frequent

assessments of current risks and addressing those. Keeping the home clean and clear of clutter is important to prevent tripping. Also, loose carpeting, area rugs and throw rugs can increase risk of tripping. Pets can cause tripping if they get underfoot, or jump up on people frequently. Lighting is important, as balance becomes more sight dependent as we age, therefore always turn on a light at night when getting up from bed. Bathrooms are a common place for falls, and the use of walk-in tubs/showers, grab bars, etc. are very important. Once balance is affected, climbing ladders even just to change a light bulb and home repairs that require you to get up on the roof should be avoided, and you should ask for assistance or have someone else complete the tasks for you (family or neighbors may be helpful).

So remember, BE SAFE, and if you know family or friends who need extra help, ask them if they need your help as that can be all it takes to prevent falls and brain injuries.

Neurology Services

As part of our commitment to providing premier person-centric medical care, Thunderbird IM has two board certified neurologists, Darry Johnson, MD and Thomas Habiger, MD. Both diagnose and treat adults facing disorders of the nervous system including Alzheimer’s disease and other forms of dementia; migraines and other headache types; peripheral neuropathy; restless legs syndrome; Parkinson’s disease and other movement disorders; seizures and epilepsy; multiple sclerosis; neuropathic pain syndromes; TIAs and stroke prevention. They also perform electromyograms (EMG) and nerve conduction studies on-site.

LOCATIONS

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