

**After a brain injury, drinking alcohol or using other drugs can cause a seizure.**

Some people with a brain injury have an increased risk of seizures. Those who are at a very high risk are given medication to prevent them.

Alcohol and other drugs increase the chance that even those at the lower levels of risk will have a seizure. Alcohol and non-prescription drugs prevent seizure medications from working, further increasing the risk of seizures.

**People who drink alcohol or use other drugs after a brain injury are more likely to have another brain injury.**

A person who has difficulty thinking clearly, walking smoothly, or reacting quickly due to a brain injury is three times more likely to have another injury.

People who further cloud their abilities with alcohol or drugs will have an even higher risk of another injury. Second and subsequent injuries will cause more harm than the first one. The destruction of more cells as a result of a second injury will leave even fewer cells to do the same jobs. Some abilities will be lost because of fewer cells to make these functions possible.

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**For more information, contact:**

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ACQUIRED  
BRAIN  
INJURY

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Partnership Project

## Alcohol & Drugs

**... serving individuals with acquired brain injury, their families and their communities**

## **Should people with brain injuries drink alcohol or use drugs? In making your decision, consider the following eight points:**

### **People who begin or continue using alcohol or other drugs after a brain injury don't recover as quickly or completely.**

If people who have had a brain injury begin using alcohol or other drugs, they may lose much of the progress they have made. Because they lost brain cells in the injury, the remaining cells must work harder for the person to do some of the same activities they did before the injury. If the remaining cells are affected by alcohol or drugs, they will not be able to take over the duties of the dead cells. That means skills a person could have regained are now lost.

### **Brain injuries can cause problems in balance, walking and/or talking that worsen when a person uses alcohol or drugs.**

For people whose brain injury has caused difficulties with balance, movement and speech, alcohol and other drugs further reduce ability in these areas.

### **People who have had a brain injury often say or do things without thinking first. This problem is worsened by using alcohol and other drugs.**

Acting before thinking can be a common problem for people with brain injuries. It is also a problem for people who abuse alcohol and drugs. Not being able to control what they say or do can lead to increased risk-taking, arguments, or other socially inappropriate behaviour.

### **Brain injuries can cause problems with thinking, such as concentration and memory. Using alcohol and other drugs make these problems worse.**

Many people have to learn new skills, or relearn old ones, after a brain injury. People may have trouble with concentration, memory, problem-solving and other thinking skills. Alcohol and other drugs can also interfere with learning new information. People with an ABI are unable learn and use these new skills as well when drinking or using drugs.

### **After a brain injury, alcohol and other drugs have a more powerful effect.**

Brain injury results in a loss of brain cells. Cells that remain must do their own work plus the work of the dead cells. Because there are fewer cells after a brain injury, more alcohol or drugs go to fewer cells, increasing the impact of the alcohol or drugs on a person's ability to function. They become intoxicated more quickly, magnifying the effect of the alcohol or other drug. Alcohol and drugs can also lessen the effectiveness of prescribed medications.

### **People with brain injury are more likely to feel low or depressed. Drinking alcohol (a depressant) or getting high on other drugs makes depression worse.**

Depression is fairly common after a brain injury. Some people may try to cope by drinking alcohol or using other drugs. While people may "forget" their problems for awhile, these problems are still there when they are sober. An endless cycle can be established, with depression leading to substance use, and increased depression. This behaviour decreases overall ability, increasing depression even more.