

Alcohol & Traumatic Brain Injury



The information in this newsletter is applicable to the area formerly known as PAPHR Health Region.

Alcohol and traumatic brain injury (TBI) are closely related. Up to 50% of adults with TBI were drinking more alcohol than is recommended before they were injured. People who were over age 60 when they had their TBI were less likely to drink too much before their injury, but those who did had worse outcomes. Although many people initially drink less after a TBI, starting to drink again increases their chances of having worse outcomes. By 2 years after the injury, we find that more than 40% start drinking again.

After a TBI, many people are more sensitive to alcohol. Drinking raises their risk of getting injured again. It also makes cognitive (thinking) problems worse and increases the risk of emotional problems such as depression. Drinking can also get in the way of TBI recovery. For these reasons, doctors urge people with TBI not to drink. Not drinking can prevent further injury to the brain and promote healing



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Facts about TBI and alcohol

Alcohol and TBI recovery

- TBI recovery goes on for a lot longer than we used to think was possible. Most people see improvements for many years after injury.
- Drinking can slow down or stop TBI recovery.
- Not drinking gives the brain the best chance to heal.
- People's lives often continue to get better many years after TBI. Not drinking can increase the chance of improvement

Alcohol, brain injury and seizures

- People with TBI are at risk for seizures.
- Drinking may increase the risk of having seizures and can trigger seizures.
- Not drinking may reduce the risk of seizures

Alcohol and the risk of having another TBI

- People who have had a TBI are at high risk of having another one.
- People who have an alcohol-related TBI are more than four times as likely to have another TBI. This may be because both TBI and alcohol can cause problems with vision, coordination, and balance.
- Not drinking can reduce the risk of having another TBI.

Alcohol and cognitive function

- Alcohol and TBI both affect cognitive skills like memory and flexible thinking (this is thinking about things in a different way).
- Alcohol may make some of the cognitive problems caused by TBI worse.
- Alcohol may affect people with TBI more than it did before their TBI.
- The negative cognitive effects of alcohol can last from days to weeks after drinking stops.
- Not drinking can keep your cognitive abilities at their best and help you stay sharp and focused.

Alcohol and mood

- Depression is about 8 times more common in the first year after TBI than in the general population.
- Using alcohol can cause depression or make it worse.
- Alcohol can make anti-depressant medicines less effective. People who take these medicines should not drink.
- One way to improve feelings of sadness or depression after TBI is to stop or cut down on drinking.

Alcohol and sexuality

- A low sex drive is the most common effect of TBI on sexuality.
- Alcohol causes low levels of testosterone in men.
- Alcohol may cause problems with erections and orgasms in men.
- Alcohol reduces sexual satisfaction in men and women.
- Avoiding alcohol improves sexual ability and activity in men and women.

Alcohol and TBI

Other reasons to avoid alcohol

In addition, persons with TBI who use substances are more likely to experience:

- Unemployment
- Living alone
- Feeling isolated
- Lower life satisfaction
- Interactions with prescribed drugs or other medical conditions
- Criminal activity and being arrested
- Injury or being victimized
- Additional brain damage

How much alcohol is "safe" after TBI?

After TBI, the brain is more sensitive to alcohol. This means that even one drink may not be safe. This is especially true when you need to do things that require balance, coordination, and quick reactions, such as walking on uneven surfaces, riding a bike, or driving a car. Thus, no amount of alcohol is totally safe after TBI.

What should you do?

Using alcohol or other drugs after a TBI is risky. Some people keep drinking or using drugs after a TBI and don't want to stop. Others know they should stop or reduce their alcohol or drug use, but they don't know how; they may have tried in the past and failed.

If you want to stop using alcohol or other drugs, you have many options. Some people benefit from self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Others get help from doctors, psychologists, or counselors with experience treating addiction.

Ways to change, cut down, or stop drinking

Some key steps to change, cut down, or stop drinking are as follows:

- Find people who support you in changing your drinking.
- Set a specific goal.
- Spell out how you will meet your goal.
- Figure out what people, places, things or feelings trigger drinking. Then figure out ways to cope with those triggers ahead of time.
- Reward yourself for sticking to your plan and meeting your goals.
- Have a back-up plan if your first plan doesn't work.

Alcohol and TBI

How family members can help

You can't force another person to stop drinking or using drugs. But you can support them. Going to Al-Anon meetings is a good way to support a friend or a family member of someone who has problems with alcohol or drugs; it can also promote change. You can also join with other family or friends to tell your loved one about your concerns.

Substance abuse treatment often includes both the individual and family or friends. The greater a person's cognitive impairments after brain injury, the more important it becomes that people in his or her surroundings are willing to be involved in the treatment process. Similarly, for people who do not see themselves as having a problem, it is more important that family and friends be willing to join professionals to get a person started in addressing their substance use.



References:

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(2019).Giving a Hand[online image].Retrieved from istockphoto.com

ABI Services Library

We also have a large collection of reference books, activity guides, and easy to read books available for survivors, family members & professionals to borrow.

We have an online searchable list of all the resources in our collection.

Check out: www.librarything.com/catalog/ABIServices

To borrow resources from this collection, contact: **Lisa Chambers** phone 306-765-6629

Email: Lisa.Chambers@saskhealthauthority.ca

Additional resources are also available on the provincial website at <http://www.abipartnership.sk.ca/>

Sask. North Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) Services

Who We Are

Sask. North Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) Services is a group of programs that assists individuals, families and communities affected by an acquired brain injury.

We are a part of the Acquired Brain Injury Partnership Project that is managed by Sask Health and funded by Saskatchewan Government Insurance (SGI).

Our programs include:

- Sask. North ABI Outreach Team
- Sask. North Independent Living Program
- Sask. North Education and Prevention Program

Who We Can Help

To qualify for services clients must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Have a diagnosis of a moderate to severe acquired brain injury supported by medical records and be medically stable.
- Be a resident of Saskatchewan or eligible for Saskatchewan Health coverage.
- Are open to working cooperatively on goal-directed rehabilitation with ABI and other service providers.
- Community agencies, caregivers, employers, families and schools who require resources and support are eligible as well.

**** Individuals are prioritized for services based on time since injury with priority given to those whose injury occurred in the past (3) years.**

**** Individuals who have a congenital brain injury or one that is a result of a progressive condition will not be considered.**

What We Do

Sask. North ABI Outreach Team

- Case Management: helping develop client-driven goals, coordination health services, providing referrals and planning for return to work or school.
- Consultation: providing information to others regarding specific client care.
- Brain Injury education.
- Adult & children's camps

Sask. North Independent Living Program

- Activities of daily living: helping individuals become more independent through short-term interventions.
- Assistance to find housing.
- Therapeutic recreation and leisure services.
- Vocational: exploring work or volunteer opportunities.

Sask. North Education and Prevention Program

- Prevention Activities: Prevent Alcohol & Risk-related Trauma in Youth (PARTY) Program, Brain Walk, Brain Waves, Safety Resource Kits, ATV, snowmobile and traffic safety, Bike safety, Child car seat clinics and Fall Prevention.
- Mild Brain Injury (MBI) education.

Our mission is to provide individual and family support to people with ABI so that they may live successfully in their communities with improved quality of life.



**Sask. North
Acquired Brain
Injury (ABI)
Services**

**1521– 6th Ave West
Prince Albert, SK
S6V 5K1**

Phone:

(306) 765-6630

Toll Free:

1-866-899-9951

Fax:

(306) 765-6657

ABI Monthly Programming

Coffee Talk—#465 7th Street East Prince Albert

Join us for an afternoon of good conversation, sharing, learning, and lots of laughs!

- **Every second and fourth Thursday of the month**
- **1:30-3:00pm**

Phone Nicole for details (306) 765-6480

Drop in for all or a portion of this group.

Free program and Refreshments provided.



ABI Drop-In Program-Minto Bowl

Join us for an afternoon of cards, games and fun!

- **Wednesdays**
- **1:30-3:00pm**

The program is free.

Other programs offered include:

- Crafts
- Art
- Fitness

For further information on the programs offered at this time please call Nicole Storoschuk, Recreational Therapist at (306) 765-6480.

Introduction to ABI - Online Series

Available online at **www.abipartnership.sk.ca**

Designed to provide basic level knowledge about the effects of brain injury and strategies to help recovery. Many other resources are also available on this website.

