

Traumatic Brain Injury Program (TBI)



Traumatic Brain Injury and Alcohol: *A Dangerous Mix!*

Alcohol

Most people drink alcohol on certain occasions, but some people drink excessively and, as a result, may face social, legal, financial, familial and health problems.

Our behaviour when under the effect of alcohol can cause accidents such as falls, assaults or road accidents.

SHORT AND LONG-TERM ALCOHOL RELATED PROBLEMS

Acute alcohol intoxication can cause:

- ▶ Increased fatigue
- ▶ Attention and concentration disorders
- ▶ Memory problems
- ▶ Articulation difficulties
- ▶ Difficulty finding words when speaking
- ▶ Sleep disorders
- ▶ Dizziness
- ▶ Balance problems
- ▶ Loss of self-control
- ▶ Aggressive behaviour

LONG-TERM ALCOHOL ABUSE CAN CAUSE:

- ▶ Medical problems such as:
 - Leg nerve damage resulting in poor balance, muscular weakness and loss of foot sensitivity;
 - Cirrhosis of the liver;
 - Alcoholic dementia (confusion memory and reasoning deficits);
 - Cancer, pancreatitis, heart failure;
- ▶ Severe sleep and mood disorders, including depression;
- ▶ Financial difficulties, family conflicts (divorce) and job-related problems (loss of employment)
- ▶ Cognitive disorders, such as memory, attention and concentration problems, or mental sluggishness;

THE EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL ON TBI PATIENTS

What is a Traumatic Brain Injury?

A TBI is a cerebral injury characterized by destruction or dysfunction of brain cells provoked by abrupt contact between the brain and the skull. A TBI can generate physical injuries, cognitive alterations (attention, concentration, memory) and behavioural changes (loss of control, irritability, aggressiveness). These conditions vary in intensity and duration (temporary or permanent), according to the severity of the trauma.

Recovery Mechanism

After suffering a TBI, the brain makes an attempt to heal itself through a recovery process involving the surviving brain cells. Alcohol has the detrimental effect of interrupting or interfering with this process.

The toxic effects of alcohol can cause increased destruction of brain cells, which affect our mood, reasoning and judgement; and thus can amplify both the frequency and intensity of TBI-related disorders. As a result, individuals who consume alcohol following a TBI have less chance of complete recovery than those who don't drink.

“DO’S” AND “DON’TS”

The effects of alcohol are generally accentuated following a TBI, especially if symptoms of the injury are still present.

A single drink can cause dizziness, nausea and vomiting. Headaches can be more intense and frequent. In addition, there is an increased chance of falling, resulting in a second TBI that could bring disastrous consequences, including the prolongation of hospitalization.

A FEW TIPS

- ▶ Do not drink alcohol or take any other non-prescribed drugs during the first months following the TBI or as long as symptoms of the injury persist;

- ▶ Discuss any concerns regarding your alcohol consumption with your social worker or doctor during your hospitalization;
- ▶ Seek information about programs in your neighbourhood for individuals with problems related to alcohol abuse;
- ▶ Request information from Info-Santé;
- ▶ Contact your CLSC or any other appropriate community resource;
- ▶ Stay vigilant and don't yield to negative influences. Keep in mind the risks related to alcohol consumption following a TBI!

We made this pamphlet because many patients with TBI have problems related to alcohol abuse. You are not alone! Talk about it . . .

Prepared by members of the TBI Program

Jehane Dagher, MD
Elaine de Guise, PhD
and the team members