$\frac{What \ \text{You Need To Know About}}{Head \ Injuries}$

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, more and more retired NFL football players are testing positive for CTE, or chronic traumatic encephalopathy, a degenerative brain condition caused by repeated head trauma. While remarkably sad, their plight has elevated the level of awareness in this country around traumatic brain injuries, including concussions.

The National Institute for Neurological Disorders and strokes defines traumatic brain injury (TBI) as "a form of acquired brain injury, [that] occurs when a sudden trauma causes damage to the brain. TBI can result when the head suddenly and violently hits an object, or when an object pierces the skull and enters brain tissue. "



Often, however, symptoms of TBI may "hide" and do irreparable damage while the victim "shakes it off" and goes on with everyday life.

The world was shocked when Natasha Richardson, beloved actress and wife of actor Liam Neeson, died after a seemingly mild fall on the "bunny slopes" while taking a ski lesson with her son in Mont Tremblant, Canada. Richardson reportedly refused medical treatment immediately after the accident and was functioning normally. But shortly later, a headache sent her to the hospital where she lost consciousness and died from her injuries. Doctors say she suffered from "talk-and-die" syndrome.

Perhaps the most terrifying of all closed head injuries because of its hidden, sneaky and abrupt theft of a victim's life, "talk-and-die" syndrome illustrates the urgent nature of brain injuries.

This guide addresses some of the most common forms of brain injuries, their causes and symptoms, and how you should treat them.

In A Nutshell If you have experienced a blow to the head, seek medical help. Don't "play tough and shake it off."

THE MOST COMMON CAUSES AND FORMS OF TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

The Centers for Disease Control reports that 50,000 people die each year from traumatic brain injury. Additionally, 235,000 people are hospitalized with TBI and 1.1 million people are treated and released from an emergency department with TBI.

The CDC also reports that the leading causes of traumatic brain injury are:

- Falls (28%)
- Motor vehicle-traffic crashes (20%)
- Assaults (11%)



According to The Brain Alliance, the most common forms of head injuries include:

- **Concussion**: Caused when the brain receives trauma from an impact or a sudden momentum or movement change. The blood vessels in the brain may stretch and cranial nerves may be damaged.
- **Contusion**: Bruise (bleeding) on the brain, which may need to be surgically removed.
- **Coup-Contrecoup**: Contusions that are both at the site of the impact and on the complete opposite side of the brain. This occurs when the force impacting the head is not only great enough to cause a contusion at the site of impact, but also is able to move the brain and cause it to slam into the opposite side of the skull, which causes the additional contusion.
- **Diffuse Axonal**: Caused by shaking or strong rotation of the head, as with Shaken Baby Syndrome, or by rotational forces, such as with a car accident. Injury occurs because the unmoving brain lags behind the movement of the skull, causing brain structures to tear.

While not among the "most common" forms of traumatic brain injury, "talk-and-die" syndrome merits a brief description due to the alarming nature of its symptoms.

Talk-and-Die Syndrome

After Natasha Richardson's tragic death, this article ran on Phys.Org:

Probing question: What is 'Talk and Die' Syndrome? By Alexa Stevenson

According to Dr. David Good, head of neurology at Penn State's Hershey College of Medicine, this condition is usually caused by a particular head injury called epidural hematoma.

"Epidural hematoma is due to a fracture of the temporal bone, just in front of the ear," Good explained. "The temporal bone is thin compared to the rest of the skull, and if you bump it, it tends to fracture more easily. The problem is there's an artery that lies just under the bone."

This vulnerable artery — called the middle meningeal — carries blood to the scalp. If it is damaged, the bleeding can be swift and severe. "This is truly a medical emergency," said Good. "You can't wait three or four hours to treat it."

The middle meningeal artery is not located in the brain itself, he notes, but rather outside the dura, a thick membrane that surrounds the organ. "If damaged, it bleeds into what's called the epidural space, outside the dura, so there are no immediate symptoms." As the hemorrhage grows, however, the dura pushes in against the brain, and the brain becomes compressed.

Until that compression occurs, the injured person may seem to be okay, hence the "talk" in "Talk and Die." Said Good, "The person may have a headache and they may briefly lose consciousness, but then they'll be awake and they'll talk and seem fairly normal for a period of time — anywhere from five minutes to as much as an hour." Eventually, however, the sufferer becomes confused, and slowly lapses into a coma. "As the pressure builds in the brain," Good explains, "the person becomes unresponsive, and eventually the bleeding puts pressure on critical centers of the brain like the brain stem, and this can cause death."

(For the complete article, visit: http://phys.org/news165168602.html)

Clearly, all forms of head injury should be followed up immediately with medical treatment.

SYMPTOMS OF TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

The symptoms of traumatic brain injuries vary by the severity of the impact or wound. The Brain Alliance describes the following levels of brain injury severity:

Mild traumatic brain injury occurs when:

- Loss of consciousness does not have to occur—the person may be dazed or confused
- Loss of consciousness is very brief, usually a few seconds or minutes
- Testing or scans of the brain may appear normal
- A mild traumatic brain injury is diagnosed only when there is a change in the mental status at the time of injury—the person is dazed, confused, or loses consciousness. The change in mental status indicates that the person's brain functioning has been altered, this is called a concussion

A moderate traumatic brain injury occurs when:

- A loss of consciousness lasts from a few minutes to a few hours
- Confusion lasts from days to weeks
- Physical, cognitive, and/or behavioral impairments last for months or are permanent.

Severe Brain Injury

• Severe head injuries usually result from crushing blows or penetrating wounds to the head. Such injuries crush, rip and sheer delicate brain tissue. This is the most life threatening, and the most intractable type of brain injury.



Post-Concussion Syndrome

Because the word "concussion" is currently discussed on ever soccer field and high school football stadium in the country, it's especially important to understand the process of recovery from such injuries, also known as "post-concussion syndrome."

Post-concussion syndrome is more common after a mild traumatic brain injury. According to the Concussion Clinic at Burwood Hospital in New Zealand, the majority of people with post-concussion syndrome recover completely in three to six months. However, dealing with the following symptoms can be difficult.

бүмртом	Percent of people who face it
Reduced concentration	71%
Irritability	66%
Tiredness	64%
Low Mood	63%
Memory problems	59%
Headaches	59%
Anxiety	58%
Trouble thinking	57%
Dizziness	52%
Blurred or double vision	45%
Sensitivity to bright light	40%

Patients are urged to rest and take plenty of time to recover after a brain injury. Just as a broken bone is your body's way of telling you that it's hurt and needs time to heal, the symptoms above are messages telling you to slow down. Most experts agree that the more time you take to heal immediately following an injury, the shorter your overall recovery period.

WHO IS MOST AT RISK?

The Centers for Disease Control report that the following groups are at highest risk for traumatic brain injury:

- Males are about 1.5 times as likely as females to sustain a TBI.
- The two age groups at highest risk for TBI are 0- to 4-year-olds and 15- to 19-year-olds.
- Certain military duties (e.g., paratrooper) increase the risk of sustaining a TBI.

Sadly, African Americans have the highest death rate from TBI. In fact, the African-American population has a higher death rate from TBI than any other ethnic group in the United States. Most of these incidents are related to homicide.

Lower socioeconomic status is also associated with increased risk of TBI.



WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

Obviously, the very first thing you should do upon sustaining a head injury is to seek immediate medical care. Don't "shake it off" and try to play it down. Simply put: you are not the best judge of your brain's condition, especially after a severe fall or accident.

Similarly, just as you're not the best judge of your health, you may not be your own best advocate if your injury was caused by someone else's negligence. Seek legal assistance if your injury was caused by someone else, especially if your recovery will entail lost work or high medical costs.



What are the legal implications?

When you read stories about people who suffer brain injuries, you immediately think of the medical and physical hurdles that they will face in treatment. Rarely do people consider the legal repercussions of brain injuries, but they are truly no less important.

Think about it: What if you were less able to use your brain? Less capable of complete thoughts, logical decision-making, even simple day-to-day functions?

The legal implications of brain injuries can be overwhelming. For example:

- Have you named someone to make medical decisions for you?
- What were the circumstances of your injury? (Did it occur due to some wrongful situation? Did it occur while you were on the job?)
- Will this injury require long-term care or planning?
- What types of insurance provisions are available to you? (For example, victims of brain injuries may be able to access their own car insurance after an accident that causes brain trauma, even if it was someone else's fault. There are often more options available than victims are aware of.)
- Do you have an advanced medical directive or will?

Generally, it is a good idea to <u>contact an</u> <u>attorney after suffering a brain injury</u>. You or your family may be completely unaware of your rights and you may be completely unaware of how to access insurance dollars that may help tremendously in your care.



CONCLUSION

Of course, the best way to handle a traumatic brain injury is to prevent it from happening in the first place. Make sure your car has air bags. Strap your seat belt on. Wear a helmet! (Between 70% and 80% of all fatal bicycle crashes involve brain injuries. If everyone wore a helmet when riding a bicycle, one death every day could be prevented.)

Thankfully, awareness of this issue is growing daily. Yet, our society still seems to value the "heroes" who "play on" or the victims who walk away from horrific car accidents. But are they truly well? You simply cannot know without proper medical care.

We must learn from the NFL players with dementia, the children who can't play in bright sunlight due to repeat soccer injuries, and from the people who die suddenly from skiing falls.

If you do sustain a TBI, seek immediate medical care. Err on the side of caution. Remember, most traumatic head injuries leave no visible signs of the danger that lurks inside.



MORE RESOURCES

Brain Injury Association of America www.biausa.org 800-444-6443

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov 800-311-3435

Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center <u>www.dvbic.org</u> 800-870-9244

Health Resources and Services Administration <u>www.hrsa.gov</u> 301-443-3376

National Association of State Head Injury Administrators <u>www.nashia.org</u> 301-656-3500

National Brain Injury Research Treatment and Training Foundation <u>www.nbirtt.org</u> 434-220-4824

National Center for Medical Rehabilitation Research, NICHD, NIH www.nichd.nih.gov/about/ncmrr 800-370-2943

National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research <u>www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/nidrr</u> 202-245-7640

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, NIH <u>www.ninds.nih.gov</u> 800-352-9424

North American Brain Injury Society <u>www.nabis.org</u> 703-960-6500

Social Security Administration www.ssa.gov 800-772-1213