Brain Injuries and Older People

Like young men and small children, older adults also are at greater risk for brain injuries than the rest of the population. In those 75 and older, falls are responsible for most of the traumatic brain injuries (TBIs).

Older adults are at greater risk of falling due to vision and balance problems, brittle bones, inflexibility and medications.

Those with Alzheimer’s disease are even more in danger. Changes in abilities and coordination coupled with poor memory sometimes make it challenging simply to go up stairs. Having had a TBI increases the risk of Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s diseases, illnesses that result in the degeneration of brain function. So avoiding falls is very desirable!

Here are tips for avoiding falls around the house:
- Install handrails in bathrooms and both sides of staircases.
- Use a non-slip mat in the bath or shower.
- Remove all area rugs.
- Use stronger light bulbs, replace burnt out lights and turn on the lights!
- Keep stairs and floors clear of clutter.
- Stay current with eye exams.
- Exercise! Stronger muscles, quicker reaction time and better balance all add up to fewer falls.

With spring just around the corner, now is the perfect time to make these home improvements for yourself or someone you love. Having a bad fall can change someone’s life forever.

March Is Brain Injury Awareness Month

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the gifts of thought and feeling and memory. Help me be understanding of and patient with those in whom these gifts are compromised. Amen.

Brain Injuries and Young People

Between 2.5 and 6.5 million Americans have had a traumatic brain injury (TBI). Alcohol plays a role in many of these. Half of all TBIs are transportation accidents, violence is implicated in over 10% and sports injuries account for 3%.

Certain age groups are more likely than others to have TBIs:

Young men ages 15 to 24, especially those in lower socioeconomic levels, are most likely to be involved in risky driving, physical fights and criminal activity. These increase the likelihood of a TBI. Always wearing a seat belt and never driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs greatly reduce this risk. (Accidents are the leading cause of death or disability in men under 35.)

Children under age five are at higher risk for TBIs than the general population, too, because they fall often and can be the victims of child abuse.

Shaken baby syndrome, the consequence of a form of child abuse, is a serious brain injury. Babies have weak neck muscles and struggle to support their heavy heads. When an infant is shaken, the brain moves back and forth inside the skull, causing bruising, swelling and bleeding. Brain cells are destroyed, and the brain stops getting enough oxygen. Only a few seconds of shaking is needed to cause irreversible brain damage in an infant. Half those with shaken baby syndrome die, and survivors may require lifelong medical care.

Shaken baby syndrome is 100% preventable, and parents can educate one another about its dangers.

- advocatehealth.com
- sbssupportnetwork.webs.com (Shaken Baby Support Network)
- niu.edu/mcycle (Motorcycle Safety Project for Illinois)
- littleleague.org>Programs>Safety Program (Little League Safety Program ASAP)
- ninds.nih.gov/health_and_medical/pubs/TBI (Nat’l. Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke)