

ALCOHOL & DRUGS AFTER A BRAIN INJURY

Facts:

- People who use alcohol or other drugs after they have had a brain injury don't recover as much.
- Brain injuries cause problems in balance, walking or talking that get worse when a person uses alcohol or other drugs.
- After a brain injury, alcohol and other drugs have a more powerful effect.
- Alcohol, other drugs and brain injury often go together – both before and after an injury.
- Alcohol is present in more than half of all brain injuries.
- Alcohol is a factor in 66% of brain injuries caused by moving vehicles and 60% involving violence.
- These numbers do not include the use of other drugs at the time of an injury.
- People who have had a brain injury often say or do things without thinking first, a problem that is made worse by using alcohol and other drugs.
- Brain injuries cause problems with thinking, like concentration or memory and using alcohol or other drugs makes these problems worse.
- After a brain injury, drinking alcohol or using other drugs can cause a seizure.
- People who have had a brain injury are more likely to have times that they feel low or depressed and drinking alcohol and getting high on other drugs makes this worse.
- People who drink alcohol or use other drugs after a brain injury are more likely to have another brain injury.

ALCOHOL EFFECTS

- The brain is more sensitive to alcohol and other drugs after an injury.
- There are not many neurons to absorb the alcohol or other drugs.
- No matter how much alcohol or other drugs a person was able to use before, it's less now.
- Also, alcohol interferes with prescribed medications. You get drunk faster and lose the good effect of the medicine.

Recovery

- Some brain cells (neurons) are killed and others are disconnected at the time of a brain injury.
- Recovery means re-learning by making new connections between neurons.
- Using alcohol and other drugs after a brain injury gets in the way of your recovery by interfering with new connections between neurons.

Balance, walk, talk

- If you experience problems with balance, walking or talking after your brain injury – alcohol and other drugs make the problems even worse.
- Without a brain injury, alcohol and other drugs can make people lose their balance or fall down.
- People who have been drinking or using other drugs may slur their speech.
- Problems walking and talking caused by your brain injury, will be increased by alcohol & other drugs.

Thinking

- Every brain has a program called ‘good idea / bad idea’ – it tells you what is appropriate and what not.
- For some people a brain injury takes away the fine line between good and bad ideas.
- Alcohol can also cause a person to say whatever comes to mind.
- Alcohol together with a brain injury shuts off the ‘good idea/bad idea’ and that’s a **bad idea**.

Learning

- Many people have to learn new skills, or relearn old ones following a brain injury.
- People have trouble with concentration, memory, word finding, problem solving and other thinking skills, depending where the brain is injured.
- Alcohol and other drugs also interfere with the ability to think and learn new things.
- Adding alcohol and other drugs with your brain injury, just makes thinking that much harder.

Depression

- Being depressed is fairly common after a brain injury. Sometimes it is the injury to the brain that causes depression.
- Everything is different and it is also the change in a person's life that lead to depression – there are financial worries and boredom.
- Many people turn to using alcohol and other drugs to try to make the depression go away.
- Alcohol depresses the brain and that depresses you.

Seizure

- Seizures are a problem for about 5% of people who have a brain injury. Even though that is a low number, seizures are serious and steps need to be taken to avoid them.
- Some people have anti-seizure medication. Mixing alcohol and other drugs with this medication is very dangerous and can INCREASE the change of seizure.
- Taking yourself of medications to drink is DANGEROUS.
- Doubling up on anti-seizure medications to drink is DANGEROUS.
- Get the facts from your doctor, and then use your brain.

ANOTHER BRAIN INJURY

- Among people who have had one brain injury, the chance of a second injury is three times greater.
- Brain injury may cause problems with balance, coordination, vision and judgement that lead to other injuries.
- By drinking alcohol or using other drugs after a brain injury, you are more likely to have another injury. Also, with each brain injury it takes less force to cause greater harm.

Adapted from "User's Manual for Faster, More Reliable Operation of a Brain after Injury" Ohio Valley Center for Brain Injury Prevention & Rehabilitation, 1996 Retrieved from <http://www.ohiovalley.org/informationeducation/materials/usersmanual/begin/>