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If Veterans don't help Veterans, who will?

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Learn about Brain Injuries this Month

3/25/2015

The Military Health System continues to emphasize Brain Injury Awareness this month. Learning about brain injury can not only help prevent unnecessary injury, but can help you understand different types of injuries and how you can help someone who has experienced a brain trauma.

Brain injuries affect millions of Americans each year. Just as no two people are exactly alike, no two brain injuries are exactly alike. After an impact to the head, a person with a brain injury can experience a variety of symptoms. Brain injuries can be classified as acquired or traumatic.

An acquired brain injury is an injury to the brain, which is not hereditary, genetic, progressive, or initiated by birth trauma. While a traumatic brain injury (TBI) can be considered an acquired brain injury, traumatic brain injuries are caused by an external force.

A concussion is the most common type of traumatic brain injury. A concussion can be caused by direct blows to the head, gunshot wounds, violent shaking of the head, or force from a whiplash type injury. This type of injury occurs because the brain receives an impact or a sudden momentum or movement change. A person with a concussion may or may not experience a brief loss of consciousness. A concussion may or may not show up on a diagnostic imaging test, such as a CAT scan so it is important to know the symptoms of a brain injury and watch the person who has experienced any trauma to their head. You can get a contusion from a direct blow to the head; the contusion is specifically, the bruise (bleeding) on the brain.

Many think that getting a brain injury is hard to do, but the opposite is true. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the leading cause of traumatic brain injury is falls. The brain is not a hard, fixed substance. It is soft and jello-like in consistency, composed of millions of fine nerve fibers, and "floats" in cerebral-spinal fluid within our skull. When the head is struck suddenly, strikes a stationary object, or is shaken violently, this force is transmitted to the brain causing injury like concussions, contusions or any number of injuries.

Cognitive rehabilitation therapy (CRT) is an umbrella term that refers to a collection of therapy techniques that may be used to help improve an individual's cognitive (i.e. thinking) abilities after a brain injury, including TBI. TRICARE does not cover CRT as a stand-alone therapy because some of the treatments have not met TRICARE Standards of coverage as fully safe and effective. However, TRICARE offers a comprehensive rehabilitation benefit that includes occupational therapy (OT), physical therapy (PT), speech therapy and behavioral health services when ordered by a physician as part of a comprehensive individual rehabilitation treatment plan. Individual therapists commonly incorporate CRT techniques into covered services which are reimbursed under each separate therapy.

For more information, visit the [Cognitive Rehabilitation Therapy](#) page on the TRICARE website. For specific coverage details, contact your regional contractor.