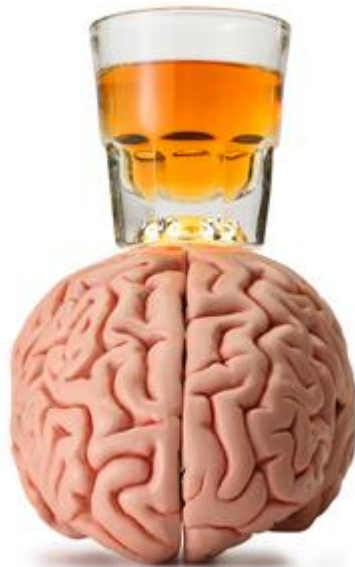


-- prepared by Sask. North Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) Services

Effects of Alcohol on Your Brain

ABI Services
...serving
individuals with
acquired brain
injury, their
families and
their
communities



After TBI, many people notice their brains are more sensitive to alcohol. Drinking increases your chances of getting injured again, makes cognitive (thinking) problems worse, and increases your chances of having emotional problems such as depression. In addition, drinking can reduce brain injury recovery. For these reasons, staying away from alcohol is strongly recommended to avoid further injury to the brain and to promote as much healing as possible.

Alcohol use and TBI are closely related. Up to two-thirds of people with TBI have a history of alcohol abuse or risky drinking. Between 30-50% of people with TBI were injured while they were drunk and about one-third were under the influence of other drugs. Around half of those who have a TBI cut down on their drinking or stop altogether after injury, but some people with TBI continue to drink heavily, which increases their risk of having negative outcomes.

Less Recovery

Some brain cells (neurons) are killed and others are disconnected at the time of an acquired 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.

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Effects of Alcohol on Your Brain Con't....

Problems with Balance, Walking & Talking

For people whose brain injury caused problems with balance, walking or talking; alcohol and other drugs make the problems even worse. Without 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 using alcohol and other drugs.

Do and Say Without Thinking

Every brain has a program called "good idea/bad idea". The program tells us what is appropriate and what is not. For example, we may think to ourselves that someone's sweater is really ugly, but "good idea/bad idea" keeps us from saying this out loud. For some people, an acquired brain injury takes away this fine line between good ideas and bad ideas. Alcohol can also cause a person to say whatever comes to mind, no matter who it hurts. Alcohol together with a brain injury shuts off the "good idea/bad idea" program, and that's a bad idea.

Problems with Thinking

Many people have to learn new skills, or re-learn old ones, following a brain injury. People can have trouble with concentration, memory, word finding, problem-solving and other thinking skills, depending on 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.

More Powerful Effect

The brain is more sensitive to alcohol and other drugs after an injury. There are not as 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 that was prescribed to aid in your recovery.

More Likely to Be Depressed

Being depressed is fairly common after a brain injury. Sometimes it is the injury to the brain that causes depression. It is also the change in a person's life that leads to depression. Everything is different, there are financial worries, and there can be boredom. Many people turn to using alcohol and other drugs to try to make this depression go away. They say it makes them less worried, more relaxed and happier. That may be true, for a while, but it quickly makes things worse. Alcohol depresses the brain and that depresses you.

Seizures

Seizures are a problem for roughly about 5% of people who have sustained an acquired brain injury. Even though that is a low number, seizures are serious and steps need to be taken to avoid them. Some people require anti-seizure medication. Mixing alcohol and other drugs with these medications is very dangerous and can INCREASE the change of seizure. Taking yourself off 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 injuries may cause problems with balance, coordination, vision and judgment 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.

What should you do?

The stakes are higher when people choose to use alcohol after having a TBI. Some people continue drinking after a TBI and don't have any desire to change that behavior. Others know they probably should stop or reduce alcohol use, but don't know how or have tried in the past and not been successful. There are many ways to stop using alcohol or other drugs and many ways to reduce the potential for harm. The great majority of people who have stopped having alcohol problems did it on their own. They got no professional help or counseling and did not use Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Don't underestimate your ability to change if you want to.

There are many ways to change, cut down or stop drinking

The key ingredients to changing your drinking are: (1) find people who will support your efforts to change your drinking ;(eg. friends, family, physician, addictions counselor, Alcoholics Anonymous etc..) (2) set a specific goal; (3) make clear how you will meet your goal; (4) identify situations or emotions that can trigger drinking, and figure out ways to cope with those triggers ahead of time; and (5) find ways to reward yourself for sticking to your plan and meeting your goals.

References:

Model Systems Knowledge Translation Centre-Factsheet- Alcohol Use After Traumatic Brain Injury. "For a Faster...More Reliable Operation of a Brain after Injury" from the Ohio Valley Center for Brain Injury Prevention and Rehabilitation. www.ohiovalley.org/.



ABI Services Library

We also have a large collection of reference books, activity guides, and easy to read books available for survivors, family members & professionals to borrow.

We have an online searchable list of all the resources in our collection.

Check out: www.librarything.com/catalog/ABIServices

To borrow resources from this collection, contact: **Lisa Chambers** phone 306-765-6629
email: lchambers@paphr.sk.ca

Additional resources are also available on the provincial website at <http://www.abipartnership.sk.ca/index.cfm>

Sask North Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) Services

Who We Are

Sask North Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) Services is a group of programs that assist individuals, families and communities affected by an acquired brain injury

We are a part of the Acquired Brain Injury Partnership Project that is managed by Sask Health and funded by Saskatchewan Government Insurance (SGI).

Our programs include:

- Sask North ABI Outreach Team
- Sask North Independent Living Program
- Sask North Education and Prevention Program

Who We Can Help

To qualify for services clients must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Have a diagnosis of moderate to severe acquired brain injury supported by medical records and be medically stable.
- Be a resident of Saskatchewan or eligible for Saskatchewan Health coverage.
- Are open to working cooperatively on goal-directed rehabilitation with ABI and other service providers.
- Community agencies, caregivers, employers, families and schools who require resources and support are eligible as well.

**Individuals are prioritized for services based on time since injury with priority given to those whose injury occurred in the past (3) years.

**Individuals who have a congenital brain injury or one that is a result of a progressive condition will not be considered.

What We Do

Sask North ABI Outreach Team

- Case management: helping develop client-driven goals, coordinating health services, providing referrals and planning a return to work or school.
- Consultation: Providing information to others regarding specific client care.
- Brain injury education
- Adult & children's camps

Sask North Independent Living Program

- Activities of daily living: helping individuals become more independent through short-term interventions.
- Assistance to find housing.
- Therapeutic recreation and Leisure services.
- Vocational: exploring work or volunteer opportunities.

Sask North Education and Prevention Program

- Prevention Activities: Prevent Alcohol & Risk-related Trauma in Youth (PARTY) Program, No Regrets Program, Brain Walk, safety resource kits, ATV, snowmobile & traffic safety, bike safety, child car seat clinics and fall prevention.
- Mild brain injury education.



Our mission is to provide individual and family support to people with ABI so that they may live successfully in their communities with improved quality of life.



Sask. North
Acquired Brain
Injury (ABI)
Services

1521 – 6th Ave West
Prince Albert, SK
S6V 5K1

PHONE:
306-765-6630

TOLL FREE:
1-866-899-9951

FAX:
306-765-6657

Coffee Talk

Join us for a morning of good conversation, sharing, learning, and lots of laughs.

- **Mondays** (except for stat holidays)
- **10:30 – noon**
- **South Hill Mall – Community Room**
behind Easy Home – East Mall Entrance)



***Drop in for all or portion of this weekly group.
Free program. Refreshments provided.***

If lack of transportation is preventing you from attending, please contact Nicole at 765-6480 for assistance.

Introduction to ABI

Online Series

Available online at www.abipartnership.sk.ca

Designed to provide basic level knowledge about the effects of brain injury and strategies to help recovery.

Many other resources also available on this website.

ABI Drop-In Program

Join us for an afternoon of cards, games and fun

- Wednesdays
- 1:30 to 3:30pm
- Minto Bowl & Rec Centre (lounge area)
210 – 13th Street East, Prince Albert

***Coffee will be supplied.
The program is free.***

If lack of transportation is preventing you from attending, please contact Nicole at 765-6480 for assistance.

Local Brain Injury Support Groups

Tisdale – Contact: Shelley (306) 873-5420 or Andrea (306) 873-5617

Prince Albert – Contact: Glenda James 1-888-373-1555

