

NEWS RELEASE

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Head Trauma

How to avoid hard knocks and potential brain injuries

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(June 1, 2010-Jourdanton, TX)-Most adults have a nostalgic childhood story about bike rides with no helmets, family car trips with no seat belts, and other death-defying tales from their “tougher” generation in simpler (and more dangerous) times. Those who survived the occasional bump on the head with no negative outcome probably weren’t tougher – just lucky.

With the arrival of summer and abundant outdoor activities, it’s critical to make sure you and your family has a safe summer by protecting their heads.

Head injuries can happen to children and adults, athletes and non-athletes, during strenuous physical activity or a simple slip or trip. The potential health effects of a brain injury can be devastating, ranging from cognitive or motor impairments, to disability or death.

More than 1.4 million U.S. residents suffer a Traumatic Brain Injury each year. It is the number-one cause of death and disability in children and young adults.

A head injury is an injury to the scalp, skull or brain and can result in a traumatic brain injury (TBI).. The most common type of head injury is a concussion, most often sustained during sports activities. A concussion is actually a mild TBI, and happens when the brain is jarred or shaken hard enough to hit the side of the skull. Interestingly, a concussion doesn’t always involve a direct hit to the head; it can be caused by impact to any part of the body that is hard enough to jar the brain.

Concussions can be mild or severe, and can temporarily – or permanently – affect the brain’s function. Other brain injuries include a contusion (a bruise and/or swelling), a hematoma (bleeding that forms a clot), and a skull fracture.

Of the TBIs reported each year, 75 percent are concussions or other mild forms of TBI. Sometimes, brain injury symptoms can be subtle, and won’t appear until days or weeks after the original injury. Long-term effects of a head injury can include permanent changes in the function of the brain or motor skills, epilepsy, and increased risk for age-related brain disorders like Alzheimer’s disease and Parkinson’s disease. That’s why it’s critical to seek immediate medical care after a head injury– even if you think the injury isn’t serious.

The Centers for Disease Control ranks the leading causes of brain injuries as falls, motor vehicle crashes, and impact-related events, in which the brain is struck by another object. TBIs range from “mild,” in which the person experiences a brief change in mental status and possibly, unconsciousness, to “severe” – an extended period of unconsciousness or amnesia. Children under age 5 and teens ages 15 to 19 are at the highest risk for a TBI.

Certain sports-related activities carry a high degree of risk. According to the Brain Injury Association of America, cycling, football, basketball, baseball/softball, and riding recreational vehicles result in the

highest number of head injuries. The organization also ranked the top five activities responsible for concussions in children from ages 5 to 18: cycling, football, basketball, playground activities, and soccer.

Often, sports-related concussions and their symptoms go unrecognized. A 2008 study by Washington University School of Medicine found that a concussion diagnosis was widely linked with a loss of consciousness while other symptoms, such as a mild headache or confusion, were overlooked.

Know the signs and symptoms of a TBI – and don't wait to seek help if an injury does occur. Watch a head injury victim for signs that a suspected concussion or mild TBI may be something more serious, such as change in pupil size, clear or bloody fluid draining from the nose, mouth or ears, a drop in blood pressure, changes in behavior, sudden sleepiness, or convulsions.

Signs of a Brain Injury

- Headaches or neck pain that do not go away
- Difficulty remembering, concentrating, or making decisions
- Slowness in thinking, speaking, acting or reading
- Getting lost or easily confused
- Lack of energy or motivation
- Mood changes (feeling sad or angry for no reason)
- Changes in sleep patterns (sleeping a lot more or having a hard time sleeping)
- Light-headedness, dizziness or loss of balance
- Urge to vomit
- Increased sensitivity to lights, sounds or distractions
- Blurred vision or eyes that tire easily
- Loss of sense of smell or taste
- Ringing in the ears

If you or a loved one has any of the above symptoms or a TBI is even slightly suspected, quick action is critical: get medical help right away. Proceed to the nearest E.R., where physicians will administer a physical exam as well as test visual, verbal and motor skills. They may refer the patient to a brain injury specialist, or use other diagnostic methods to include X-rays or a CT scan to determine the nature of the injury and appropriate treatment.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

It's important to remember, however; that head injuries don't happen only during sports activities. The chief culprit for head injuries among the elderly are slips, trips and falls.

Besides knowing the signs of a brain injury, take precautions to stay safe.

- Always buckle up in an automobile.
- Always wear a helmet and other protective gear during sporting activities, bicycling or riding recreational vehicles.
- Install window guards to keep young children from falling out of open windows.
- Make sure the area surrounding your child's playset has a shock-absorbing material such as hardwood mulch or sand.

STRMC urges you to keep the people you care about safe this summer and year-round. For more information, visit the Health Resource link on www.strmc.com to learn health tips about symptoms of a concussion or head injuries, or take an

interactive quiz to test your knowledge on sports safety, car safety, balance disorders and headaches.

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Sources: Brain Injury Association of America, www.biausa.org; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov; WebMD, www.webmd.com.