



FACT SHEET

Brain Injury & Substance Abuse

*Do you
have
trouble
with
substance
abuse
since
your
brain
injury?*

What does this mean?

Substance use after brain injury can include alcohol, illicit drugs, and/or abuse of prescription medications. The effects of these substances on the brain after an injury can impede recovery.

How might use of substances affect recovery after a brain injury?

There are many reasons why using drugs and alcohol after a brain injury is **not recommended**:

- ◆ People don't recover as well.
- ◆ Brain injuries cause problems in balance, walking, or talking that get worse when a person uses alcohol or other drugs.
- ◆ After brain injury, people 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.
- ◆ Alcohol and other drugs have a more powerful effect on the brain after injury.
- ◆ After brain injury, people are more likely to have times that they feel low or depressed, and consuming alcohol and other drugs makes this worse.
- ◆ Drinking alcohol or using other drugs can cause a seizure.
- ◆ People are more likely to have another brain injury if they are abusing substances.

Recommended strategies:

People with brain injuries and their families should know that there are treatments and strategies out there, and ones that can be very effective. Some of them include:

- ◆ Attending a support group.
- ◆ Learning to cope with cravings.
- ◆ Setting realistic goals.
- ◆ Building self-esteem.
- ◆ Medication.
- ◆ Seek professional help.

It's crucial for people to get treated for both the traumatic brain injury (TBI) and the addiction simultaneously and by someone who knows about both. Seek out programs where there is collaboration and communication between the brain injury treatment providers and the substance abuse treatment providers.

Sources: brainline.org, WETA. Further, the information in this FACT SHEET is also based on a consensus of expert opinion of the Rehabilitation Hospital of Indiana Departments of Neuropsychology and Resource Facilitation.

Disclaimer: This information is not meant to replace advice from a medical professional. You should consult your health care provider regarding specific medical concerns or treatments.

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