



MSKTC
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Model Systems
Knowledge Translation
Center

Alcohol use after traumatic brain injury (TBI)

A resource for individuals with traumatic brain injury and their supporters



This presentation is based on TBI Model Systems research and was developed with support from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR).

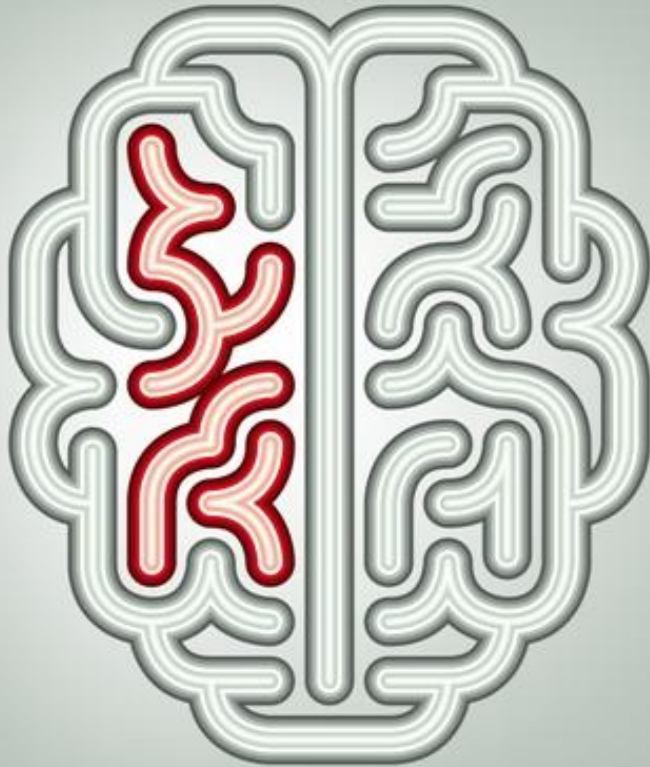
Visit www.MSKTC.org for additional TBI resources.

What this resource addresses

- This presentation summarizes the research on the effects of alcohol on survivors of traumatic brain injury (TBI).
- The information can help people with TBI and their caregivers make decisions about drinking.

What is the relationship between drinking and traumatic brain injury?

Drinking and traumatic brain injury are closely related



- Up to two-thirds of people with traumatic brain injury (TBI) have a history of alcohol abuse or high-risk drinking.
- Almost one-half of people with TBI were injured while drunk.
- Another one-third of people with TBI were injured while under the influence of other drugs.

What are the effects of alcohol on individuals with traumatic brain injury?

Drinking after TBI can increase your risk of further poor health



- Many TBI survivors notice that their brains are more sensitive to alcohol than before.
- Alcohol's negative effects can linger for days or weeks after the last drink.
- For people with TBI, even one or two drinks can be unsafe.

Alcohol can worsen mood

- In their first year after injury, TBI survivors are eight times more likely than the general population to be diagnosed with depression.
- Alcohol is a depressant; drinking after TBI could therefore increase the risk of depression.



Alcohol can interact with common medications



- Alcohol can reduce the effectiveness of many frequently prescribed medications, such as antidepressants.
- Alcohol can dangerously magnify the effects of other medications, such as anti-anxiety medications and painkillers.
- Many people have died due to alcohol-related drug interactions.

Alcohol can affect sexuality

- TBI can lead to decreased sexual desire.
- Alcohol can lower production of sex hormones and negatively influence sexual performance and satisfaction.

Alcohol and seizures



- People with TBI are at increased risk of seizures.
- Since alcohol lowers the seizure threshold, drinking can lead to increased risk of seizures.

Alcohol may slow brain recovery



- Recovery from TBI takes much longer than previously thought — healing could last for years.
- Alcohol may slow down or stop brain recovery.
- Compared to the general population, TBI survivors are three to eight times more likely of having another TBI.
- Alcohol, which impairs cognition and balance, can further increase a TBI survivor's chance of reinjury.

How to manage drinking after traumatic brain injury

What can people do to stop drinking after TBI?

Given the risks, **there is no safe level of alcohol after TBI.**

Many people with TBI want to stop or reduce their alcohol consumption.

Key ingredients to successfully changing drinking habits:

- Find people (family, friends, and others) who will support efforts to curb drinking.
- Set a specific goal.
- Make clear how that goal will be met.
- Identify situations or emotions that trigger drinking and find ways to cope with these triggers beforehand.
- Provide rewards for meeting goals.

Don't underestimate one's ability to change.

What to do if one decides to drink after TBI

- Have food and water before drinking.
- Have beer rather than liquor; use water rather than soda as a mixer.
- Sip slowly and have no more than one drink every hour or two drinks every day.
- Take vitamins B1 (thiamine), B2 (riboflavin), or B9 (folate).
- Never drink and drive.
- Take drinking holidays as reminders of the benefits of sobriety.

Family can help



- Family members can have significant positive influences on a loved one's drinking habits.
- Stage an intervention.
- Go with a loved one to his or her treatments and meetings.
- Learn about the [Community Reinforcement and Family Training \(CRAFT\) model](#), which is far better than other approaches at getting people into treatment.

How to get more information or find help

- Take a confidential [online drinking assessment](#).
- Consult with a physician or TBI rehabilitation staff member.
- The [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) (SAMHSA, 1-800-662-4357) is a Federal program that can help one locate a treatment facility.

Where to go for help



- [Alcoholics Anonymous](#) meets in most areas and has helped millions overcome alcohol dependence.
- [Moderation Management](#) and [Smart Recovery](#) are alternatives to Alcoholics Anonymous that do not use the 12-step model.
- There are many options for private treatment: look in the Yellow Pages under listings like “addiction treatment” or “chemical dependency counselor.”

Alcoholics Anonymous: <http://bit.ly/MKav5q>

Moderation Management: <http://bit.ly/MKaxKz>

Smart Recovery: <http://bit.ly/KWX6m7>