



Healthy matters to keep in mind.

# Life Balance

March 2013

## Surviving the Teenage Years Unscathed Preventing Traumatic Brain Injuries

We all do dumb things, but face it, teenagers take the cake.

This propensity for fearlessness and risk taking, particularly among male teens, often induces much angst in parents. And it should. It's estimated that about 93,000 teenagers receive a traumatic brain injury every year.<sup>1</sup>

### What is a Traumatic Brain Injury?

A Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is caused by a bump, blow, jolt, or penetration to the head that disrupts the normal function of the brain.<sup>2</sup> Depending on its severity (mild also called concussion,

moderate, or severe) it can cause symptoms from temporary unconsciousness and confusion to coma and death, with a range of other life-altering conditions in between.

Every year in the U.S:

- Approximately 1.7 million people experience a TBI and 52,000 die from the injury<sup>3</sup>
- Teenagers (aged 15-19) are most likely to sustain a TBI<sup>4</sup>, with males leading the pack
- Between 2002-2006, more than 186,000 teenagers sustained a TBI and nearly 4,000 died from them<sup>5</sup>
- 50 percent of cases involve alcohol use<sup>6</sup>

### What Causes TBIs?

The main causes of TBIs are falls, transportation accidents and sports.<sup>7</sup>

### Falls

Falling from as low as two feet can result in a traumatic brain injury, so you can only imagine what it would mean to

fall off a roof, a tree, a bridge, a building, a moving vehicle or any other surface a teenager may be inclined to surf or soar from. This applies to skateboarders, skaters, skiers, and those who ride scooters, particularly if they do not wear a helmet.

### Wheels

Driving without seat belts, distracted by passengers or under the influence of alcohol or drugs are some of the reasons for the dire statistics cited above. Half of all TBIs are due to transportation accidents involving automobiles, motorcycles, bicycles and pedestrians. They are the number one cause of TBI-related death.<sup>8</sup>

### Sports

U.S. emergency departments (ED) treat an estimated 173,285 sports, and recreation-related TBIs annually, including concussions, among children and adolescents, from birth to 19 years.<sup>9</sup>

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## Some Symptoms of Traumatic Brain Injuries

### Concussion/mild TBI:

- Loss of consciousness of approximately 30 minutes or less. Beware, just because your teen didn't pass out after the blow doesn't mean he doesn't have a TBI.
- Loss of memory for events immediately before or after the accident
- Altered mental state (feeling dazed, disoriented, or confused)
- Vision problems (blurred vision, tired eyes)

### Moderate/severe TBI:

- Loss of consciousness of 30 minutes or more
- Loss of coordination or the ability to walk
- Slowed mental capacity
- Headaches
- Repeated vomiting or nausea, convulsions or seizures
- Lack of bowel/bladder control
- Inability to awaken from sleep
- Slurred speech, trouble swallowing
- Weakness or numbness in the extremities
- Memory impairment
- Sexual problems

# SEAP

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In 2008, almost 60 percent of all ED visits for sports-related concussion involved high school age children (14-18 years of age). Another 17 percent were for middle school age children (11-13 years of age).<sup>10</sup>

Unlike other TBIs, those sustained while playing sports may turn out to be more serious because they're cumulative in nature. Repetitive concussions (or mild TBIs)

particularly those occurring within hours, days or weeks of each other can cause catastrophic, permanent brain damage and even death.<sup>11</sup>

Concussions can also occur from a blow to the body that causes the head to move rapidly back and forth. What may be considered a "ding," "getting your bell rung," or just a mild bump or blow to the head can be serious.



## Prevention: Always Better than Intervention

Here are some steps you can take to protect your teenager:

- Communicate the dangers of some of his actions. If he's into extreme activities, search online for videos that show or describe accidents and consequences of these activities, not just the thrills. Watch them together and discuss them.
- Stress the fact that it CAN happen to her.
- Encourage her to seek and engage in not-so-life-altering behaviors/activities.
- Explain the consequences of drinking and driving, and having passengers in the car.
- Ensure he wears a helmet and other safety equipment when necessary. WEARING A HELMET HELPS PREVENT OVER 80 PERCENT OF BRAIN INJURIES.
- Take the keys to the car away if you know your teen is using drugs or alcohol, especially at night. The per mile crash rate for teenage drivers is three (3) times higher after 9:00 p.m.<sup>12</sup>
- Take her to visit a local Traumatic Brain Center where he can see first hand the results of TBIs.
- Keep firearms and bullets locked away safely.
- Don't let him stay in or return to the game if he has suffered a concussion until sanctioned to do so by a medical professional, not the coach.
- Take him to the Emergency Room immediately if he shows any signs of TBIs. Note that all symptoms may not be visible right after the injury. Pay attention to any physical, mental or emotional changes.
- If your teen has suffered a concussion, keep her on a modified educational program and reduced stress. This may be necessary for up to a year post mild concussion and at times longer for more severe TBIs.

### Getting Help

#### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Center for Injury Prevention and Control

800-232-4636  
<http://www.cdc.gov/TraumaticBrainInjury/index.html>

#### National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke National Institutes of Health

<http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/tbi/tbi.htm>

#### Brain Injury Association of America

800-444-6443  
<http://www.biausa.org/>

## Resources

[www.liveandworkwell.com](http://www.liveandworkwell.com)

Visit the Live Well section for more information, tools, articles, self-help programs and resources related to life, family and relationships.

1 [http://www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury/pdf/blue\\_book.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury/pdf/blue_book.pdf)  
2 <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/about/focus-tbi.html>  
3 [http://www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury/tbi\\_ed.html](http://www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury/tbi_ed.html)  
4 Ibid  
5 [http://www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury/pdf/blue\\_book.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury/pdf/blue_book.pdf)  
6 [http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/tbi/detail\\_tbi.htm](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/tbi/detail_tbi.htm)

7 [www.cdc.gov/TraumaticBrainInjury](http://www.cdc.gov/TraumaticBrainInjury)  
8 [http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/tbi/detail\\_tbi.htm#193613218](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/tbi/detail_tbi.htm#193613218)  
9 [http://www.cdc.gov/TraumaticBrainInjury/kids\\_teens.html](http://www.cdc.gov/TraumaticBrainInjury/kids_teens.html)  
10 <http://www.hcup-us.ahrq.gov/reports/statbriefs/sb114.jsp>  
11 <http://www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury/outcomes.html>  
12 [http://www.dmv.ca.gov/teenweb/more\\_btn6/traffic/traffic.htm](http://www.dmv.ca.gov/teenweb/more_btn6/traffic/traffic.htm)