



FACT SHEET

Acquired Brain Injury

Definition

An Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) refers to damage to the brain that occurs after birth (with the exception of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder - FASD) rather than as part of a genetic or congenital disorder.

Brain injuries can occur in the following ways:

Sudden onset – caused by trauma, infection, lack of oxygen, strokes or drug use episodes

Insidious onset – from prolonged alcohol or substance abuse, tumours or degenerative neurological diseases

Most definitions of acquired brain injury exclude neurodegenerative disorders and diseases of the brain such as Parkinson's disease, Multiple Sclerosis and Alzheimer's disease (1).

Traumatic brain injury

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is not the same as head injury, since a person can sustain damage to the face, scalp and skull without necessarily injuring their brain. TBI is considered a form of acquired brain injury, and refers to brain damage caused by an impact to the head.

When the head is struck hard, the brain slams against the inside of the skull, causing physical injuries such as bruising, swelling, bleeding, twisting or tearing of tissue. There are degrees of injury, ranging from a momentary loss of consciousness (which can happen from a punch to the face, for example) to a long-term bout of unconsciousness or coma.

Characteristics

An acquired brain injury is a complex and individual condition. The brain controls every part of our being physically, intellectually and emotionally. So when the brain is injured some other part of ourselves will also be affected. A brain injury has dramatically different effects on different people. Even a mild injury can result in a serious disability that will interfere with a person's daily functioning and personal activities, often for the rest of their life.

It is common for people with an ABI to experience increased fatigue (mental and physical) and some slowing down in their ability to process information, plan and solve problems. They may experience change to their behavior and personality, physical and sensory abilities, or thinking and learning.



Causes

The leading cause of Acquired Brain Injury is stroke, where the supply of blood to the brain is stopped by a clot or bleeding. The second largest cause is accident or trauma. A traumatic brain injury (TBI) is a type of acquired brain injury caused by a blow or force applied to the head (e.g. motor vehicle accident, fall, assault or sporting accident).

Other causes include:

- ☼ Alcohol or drugs
- ☼ Disease
- ☼ Lack of oxygen
- ☼ Physical injury

Prevalence

Over 500,000 Australians have an Acquired Brain Injury (2).

- Three out every four people with acquired brain injury are under age 65.
- Two out of every three of these people acquired their brain injury before age 25.
- Three out of every four people with acquired brain injury are men.

Sources

Brain Injury Australia
Disability Services Australia
Better Health Channel

References

1 definition and information sourced from - Brain Injury Australia 2012, CDDH 2012
2 Statistics Brain Injury Australia 2012