Brain Injuries and Older Adults: Special Considerations

- Special considerations
  - Medications
  - Preventing additional injury
  - General safety considerations
  - Resources

Statistics

- 20-30% results in moderate to severe injuries
- Risk of falling and fall-related problems increases with age
- Fear of falling may impede therapy

*http://nihseniorhealth.gov/falls/aboutfalls/01.html
**Brain Injury and Older Adults**

**Provided by NeuroRehabilitation Educations and Rehabilomics Research, an NIDLRR funded TBI Model System Center**

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**The Fall Cycle**

- **Fall**
  - **Increased Risk of Falling**
  - **Brain Injury**
  - **Fear of Falling Again**
  - **Decreased Muscle Strength & Balance**
  - **Less Activity**

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**Top Causes of Falls**

- Weakness
- Poor balance
- Disrupted gait
- Foot pain or numbness
- Impaired Vision
- Cognitive Impairments
- Dehydration
- Home Hazards
- Medication side effects
  - Dizziness
  - Confusion
- Chronic Conditions
  - Blood pressure
  - History of stroke, TBI, other neurological conditions
  - Osteoporosis or Arthritis
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**Preventing Falls**

- Improve balance and strength through exercise (from therapists)
- Remove bifocal/multifocal glasses
- Wear proper footwear
- Use assistive devices
  - Canes and walkers
  - Reachers
  - Portable phones
  - Shower/toilet chairs

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*http://nihseniorhealth.gov/falls/homesafety/01.html

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Make a Falls Prevention Plan!
Preventing Falls: Walking

• Plan a walking program (20-30 minutes daily)
• Progress gradually
• Get a walking buddy
• Use assistive devices
• Wear the right shoes
• Select a good route with places to rest
• Choose a good pace

Preventing Falls in the Home

• Modify environment
  – Remove or secure lose rugs
  – Add handrails and grab bars
  – Have multiple assistive devices available around the home
  – Adequate lighting
  – Clean up spills

• Remove obstructions
• Proper flooring (flat, secure, non-slip)
• Rearrange furniture to provide room
• Create space in the home to sit and take rest breaks (on stairs or long hallways)

Considerations in Older Adults

• Individuals over 65 years frequently experience brain injuries
• The leading cause of injuries (fractures, brain trauma) among older adults is falls
• More than 1 in 3 adults over 65 years old fall each year
Other Safety Considerations

• Keep emergency numbers close by
  – Have contact numbers in a good place to use them quickly:
    • Store numbers in your phone
    • Place numbers on refrigerator at home
    • Carry numbers with you in purse or wallet
• Consider a life alert or other emergency device
  – Consider a Medical Alert bracelet
• Protect against fire or related dangers

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Other Safety Considerations

• Avoid bathroom hazards
• Prevent poisoning
  – Keep all medications, vitamins, and supplements in a safe place.
  – Keep all cleaners out of reach and in locked cabinets.
• Supervision helps promote safe behaviors and prevents falls

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Medical Emergency

• If you have a medical emergency call 911 or go to the closest Emergency Room.
• Contact your PCP, PM&R Physician, Specialists, Pharmacist with questions.
Medication Management after Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)

Disclaimer
• This information is not meant to replace the advice from a medical or legal professional. You should consult your health care provider or attorney regarding specific medical, legal, or financial concerns.

While in Inpatient Rehab
• Nurse as resource for learning about medications
• How are they taking their medications?
  – Examples: By mouth, by tube in nose or in stomach
On Discharge

Medications on Discharge

• It may be overwhelming at first to understand why you or your loved one is/are on new medications.
• A brain injury often affects an individual’s entire body. Overtime, the body can change and adapt and may not require as many medications.

Medication Review

• Medication review
  – Nursing
  – Time to ask questions

• Share a list of all of the medications they used to take (if applicable), including vitamins/supplements
Medication List

- Updated medication list should be with your loved one or you at all times.
  - List should include:
    - Supplements/Vitamins
    - How much they take
    - When they take it
    - Any allergies to medications

Sample Medication List Demo

Support and Education

- Resources available on TBI
  - UPMC TBIMS
    - http://www.rehabilomics.pitt.edu/index.htm
  - MSKTC
    - http://www.msktc.org/tbi

Resources for Older Adults

- Benedum Geriatric Center (UPMC): 412-692-4200
- UPMC Aging Institute:
  - http://www.upmc.com/Services/AgingInstitute/resources-for-caregivers
- Pepper Center
- PA Department of Aging:
  - http://www.aging.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/department_of_aging_home/18206
Follow-Up

- Appointments
  - PCP
    - Can help coordinate care with other physicians
  - PM&R Physician
    - Medication management
    - Symptom management
    - Caregiver concerns

- Specialists/Therapists
  - Outpatient tests or additional procedures after they go home.
  - Ask Questions and Review Concerns.

Advocate

- Advocate for your loved one
- Help your loved one by educating yourself about acquired brain injury (ABI)

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