ALCOHOL & DRUGS AFTER A BRAIN INJURY

Facts:

• People who use alcohol or other drugs after they have had a brain injury don’t recover as much.
• Brain injuries cause problems in balance, walking or talking that get worse when a person uses alcohol or other drugs.
• After a brain injury, alcohol and other drugs have a more powerful effect.
• Alcohol, other drugs and brain injury often go together – both before and after an injury.
• Alcohol is present in more than half of all brain injuries.
• Alcohol is a factor in 66% of brain injuries caused by moving vehicles and 60% involving violence.
• These numbers do not include the use of other drugs at the time of an injury.
• People who have had a brain injury 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.
• After a brain injury, drinking alcohol or using other drugs can cause a seizure.
• People who have had a brain injury are more likely to have times that they feel low or depressed and drinking alcohol and getting high on other drugs makes this worse.
• People who drink alcohol or use other drugs after a brain injury are more likely to have another brain injury.

ALCOHOL EFFECTS

• The brain is more sensitive to alcohol and other drugs after an injury.
• There are not many neurons to absorb the alcohol or other drugs.
• No matter how much alcohol or other drugs a person was able to use before, it’s less now.
• Also, alcohol interferes with prescribed medications. You get drunk faster and lose the good effect of the medicine.
Recovery

- Some brain cells (neurons) are killed and others are disconnected at the time of a brain injury.
- Recovery means re-learning by making new connections between neurons.
- Using alcohol and other drugs after a brain injury gets in the way of your recovery by interfering with new connections between neurons.

Balance, walk, talk

- If you experience problems with balance, walking or talking after your brain injury – alcohol and other drugs make the problems even worse.
- Without a brain injury, alcohol and other drugs can make people lose their balance or fall down.
- People who have been drinking or using other drugs may slur their speech.
- Problems walking and talking caused by your brain injury, will be increased by alcohol & other drugs.

Thinking

- Every brain has a program called ‘good idea / bad idea’ – it tells you what is appropriate and what not.
- For some people a brain injury takes away the fine line between good and bad ideas.
- Alcohol can also cause a person to say whatever comes to mind.
- Alcohol together with a brain injury shuts off the ‘good idea/bad idea’ and that’s a bad idea.

Learning

- Many people have to learn new skills, or relearn old ones following a brain injury.
- People have trouble with concentration, memory, word finding, problem solving and other thinking skills, depending where the brain is injured.
- Alcohol and other drugs also interfere with the ability to think and learn new things.
- Adding alcohol and other drugs with your brain injury, just makes thinking that much harder.
**Depression**

- Being depressed is fairly common after a brain injury. Sometimes it is the injury to the brain that causes depression.
- Everything is different and it is also the change in a person’s life that lead to depression – there are financial worries and boredom.
- Many people turn to using alcohol and other drugs to try to make the depression go away.
- Alcohol depresses the brain and that depresses you.

**Seizure**

- Seizures are a problem for about 5% of people who have a brain injury. Even though that is a low number, seizures are serious and steps need to be taken to avoid them.
- Some people have anti-seizure medication. Mixing alcohol and other drugs with this medication is very dangerous and can INCREASE the change of seizure.
- Taking yourself of medications to drink is DANGEROUS.
- Doubling up on anti-seizure medications to drink is DANGEROUS.
- Get the facts from your doctor, and then use your brain.

**ANOTHER BRAIN INJURY**

- Among people who have had one brain injury, the chance of a second injury is three times greater.
- Brain injury may cause problems with balance, coordination, vision and judgement that lead to other injuries.
- By drinking alcohol or using other drugs after a brain injury, you are more likely to have another injury. Also, with each brain injury it takes less force to cause greater harm.