

# Alcohol and Drug Use After an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)

An acquired brain injury (ABI) causes you to lose brain cells. This means that the brain cells you have left need to work harder to do the same kinds of activities you did before your injury.

Using alcohol and recreational drugs affects how your brain works. If you have an ABI, alcohol and drugs can seriously affect you and your recovery.

## **After an ABI:**

### **Using alcohol or drugs will make your recovery harder.**

- If you use alcohol or drugs after an ABI, you will not recover as well or as fast. They can make you lose any progress you have made. You may not be able to relearn some skills.
- Alcohol and drugs can also affect how well your prescribed medications work.

### **Using alcohol or drugs may cause seizures.**

- Some people with an ABI have a higher risk of seizures (sudden electrical brain activity that can change how you act, move, or feel for a short time). Using alcohol or drugs raises your chance of having a seizure, even if your risk is very low. It may also stop seizure medication from working.

### **Using alcohol or drugs can damage your brain even more.**

- Alcohol damages your brain and can cause you to lose brain cells. This can make the effects from your ABI worse.

### **People who use alcohol or drugs are more likely to have another ABI.**

- After an ABI, some people have trouble thinking clearly, walking smoothly, or reacting quickly. This makes them 3 times more likely to have another ABI.
- Each injury after an ABI causes more harm. Losing more brain cells from a second ABI leaves even fewer cells to do the same activities.

## Alcohol and drugs will affect you more quickly and have a greater effect on you.

- After an ABI, the effects of alcohol and drugs will also be much stronger and be felt faster. Using alcohol or drugs will make it harder for you to function well.

For example, you may:

- › be less able to control what you say or do. This can lead to taking risks, fighting, or acting in other ways that are not appropriate or safe.
- › have problems with focusing, learning, solving problems, and remembering.
- › have more trouble with balance, walking, and talking.
- › feel depressed.

**Remember:** When you are using alcohol or drugs, you will not be able to effectively use the coping skills you have learned.

Recovering from an ABI takes time. **Avoiding alcohol and drugs gives you the best possible chance for recovery.**

For more information, talk with your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner), a social worker, or another health care provider.

## Resources

### Provincial Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Line

- › Phone (toll-free): 1-888-429-8167

### Mental Health and Addictions Intake

- › Phone (toll-free): 1-855-922-1122
- › Hours: Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (Tuesdays until 8 p.m.)  
Outside of these hours, please leave a voicemail.
- › <https://mha.nshealth.ca/en>

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