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Diagnosing & Treating Brain Injury

It's called the "invisible injury" for a reason: brain injury is notoriously difficult to diagnose and treat. Because the brain is our most complex organ, there are a variety of tools that medical professionals can use to measure the effects of a brain injury on a person's body, thoughts, and life.

In the early stages of brain injury, diagnosis centers on any physical abnormality following a traumatic event.

How diagnosis and treatment are related

The diagnosis of brain injury involves (CAT scans) looking for signs of brain injury, either through scanning devices like computer assisted tomography (CAT scans), magnetic resonance imaging (MRIs), and X-rays, or through screening tools — usually in the form of simple tests — that measure various areas of a person's speech, movement, memory, and thought. The people most qualified to diagnose a brain injury are emergency room doctors, neurologists, and neuropsychologists.

Often the tests used to diagnose an injury help determine the appropriate course of treatment. Right after a moderate to severe injury, treatment usually focuses on medicines and surgical procedures. Once a person has been stabilized, treatment may focus more on the recovery of any lost abilities or learning to do things in a new way.

Brain injury treatment

Brain injury treatment is a complex field of medical rehabilitation. When someone has a moderate to severe injury, treatment can involve the combined efforts of neurologists, psychiatrists, physiatrists, an array of rehabilitation therapists, case managers, and social workers, along with a person's network of friends and family.

For mild traumatic brain injuries, treatment often involves resting the body and the brain. If symptoms of brain injury persist, further evaluation by a neurologist and/or a neuropsychologist may be helpful.