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A Common Workplace Injury Hurting Employees *and* Wallets

We have all experienced to some degree a bump, blow or a jolt to the head, but for 1.7 million people annually these accidents disrupt daily functioning to some degree, according to the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#) (NCSL, who provides updates on Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) legislation). These head injuries, referred to as TBIs, can lead to catastrophic costs reaching an estimated **\$60 billion a year** for employees and employers, according to NCSL. This common, but misunderstood injury, should be documented from the point of the incident, to treatment and recovery, by both employees and employers to understand the impact the TBI injury created and what, if any, work comp benefits are needed.

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), TBI is any alteration in the brain function, including mild injuries that can result in prolonged amnesia or even death. The CDC states the top five causes of TBI includes falls, motor vehicle accidents, assault, struck by/against and unknown/other.

Top Five Causes for Traumatic Brain Injury

- Falls 35.2%
- Unknown/Other 21%
- Motor Vehicle 17.3%
- Struck by/Against 16.5%
- Assault 10%

The effects of these types of injuries are not always apparent and may produce health problems months or even years down the line. This could lead to a new employer covering the costs for TBI health problems that actually occurred from past employment. With falls accounting for over 1/3 of TBIs, employers and employees alike should take precaution to prevent accidents in the workplace and document any accidents that occur. To gauge the severity of the brain injury, medical professionals typically use the Glasgow Coma Scale, according to [Brain Injury Association of America](#) (BIA). It measures in terms of a mild, moderate and severe brain injury. BIA notes that there may be no correlation between the initial Scale reading, the actual level of brain injury and a person's short or long-term recovery or functional abilities. This means that the scale is used to estimate rather than define the scope of the problem and may not correctly reveal the severity or mildness of the TBI case.

Glasgow Coma Score		
Eye Opening (E)	Verbal Response (V)	Motor Response (M)
4=Spontaneous 3=To voice 2=To pain 1=None	5=Normal conversation 4=Disoriented conversation 3=Words, but not coherent 2=No words.....only sounds 1=None	6=Normal 5=Localizes to pain 4=Withdraws to pain 3=Decorticate posture* 2=Decerebrate posture** 1=None
		Total = E+V+M

Source: [BIA](#)

*Decorticate posture is one that is abnormal and involves rigidity, clenched fists and extended legs

**Decerebrate posture is when the arms and legs go straight out, toes point downward and head and neck are arched back

The scale comprises of three tests: eye, verbal and motor responses, which are considered separately and as a sum. A score of 13-15 is considered mild; 9-12 is moderate and eight or below signals a severe brain injury, according to BIA. The scale can be used to analyze the seriousness of the injury, but only a physician can provide the diagnosis, treatment and potential for recovery.

The effects of TBI vary widely leaving both employees and employers unsure of where and when the employee should return to work. **Victims of TBI often suffer from forgetfulness, fatigue and are easily distracted**, according to [American Heroes at Work](#), a group supporting the employment success of returning service members with TBI. The following tips can aid employers in helping TBI victims return to work and may be shared with the injured employee to encourage a return-to-work attitude:

- Scheduling reminders by telephone or alarm clocks
- Provide rests breaks to prevent stimulus overload and fatigue
- Develop work task checklist
- Install memory aids, such as tape recorders
- Allow job sharing with another employee
- Limit multi-tasking
- Provide mentoring by a co-worker or retired worker
- Recognize accomplishments through positive reinforcement

Source: [Americas Heroes at Work](#)

TBI is a common workplace injury; **in fact, every 16 seconds in the U.S. a person suffers a TBI**, according to [All about TBI](#), a TBI online information portal. TBI symptoms can be elusive, so it is important that both employees and employers adjust and work together to accommodate the difficulties created by TBI. According to the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) does not contain a list of medical conditions that constitute disabilities. Instead, the ADA provides general definitions of disability that each person must meet. Therefore, some TBI sufferers will qualify under ADA and some will not. For additional information on whether a TBI case falls under the ADA visit [JAN](#). Indiana employers with questions on TBI can contact the [Brain Injury Association of Indiana](#).

References

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