

Get the Facts - Brain Injuries High Among U.S. Troops

The men and women serving in the current war are at a greater risk than ever before of suffering traumatic brain injuries (TBIs). TBI survivors run an especially high risk of developing epilepsy because of some of the tactics in which this war is being waged. These survivors might not even present symptoms from their injuries for weeks, months or even years after experiencing such concussive blasts, but these symptoms can involve complex and varied neurological, behavioral and cognitive changes in our veterans.

According to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, nearly two-thirds of the soldiers coming home from Iraq have been diagnosed with brain injuries — injuries that can affect the soldiers' post-war quality of life and increase their risks of developing the neurological seizure condition known as epilepsy. Furthermore, according to a recent study, people who have TBIs have 22 times the normal risk of having epilepsy in the year following their injury and seven times the normal risk even 10 years after the initial injury.

These injuries are more prevalent in this war compared to others because the weapons preferred by those attacking U.S. troops in this current conflict are roadside bombs, which are improvised explosives that deliver the kind of concussive blast that can cause trauma to the brain. Furthermore, in prior wars, many who are now able to survive such punishing blasts would not have been able to survive in previous wars.

- ☆ Among 105 casualties assessed between June and October 2003, doctors discovered that about two-thirds, or 67 percent, sustained brain injuries, according to Dr. Laurie Ryan, a neuropsychologist at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.
- ☆ Veteran's Affairs-funded research conducted in collaboration with the Department of Defense found that 53 percent of veterans who suffered a penetrating TBI in Vietnam developed epilepsy within 15 years. A full 15 percent did not manifest epilepsy for more than five years after their combat injury.
- ☆ Every year, 181,000 Americans develop seizures and epilepsy for the first time.
- ☆ The incidence of seizures in the first year after head trauma is 12.7 times the risk of unprovoked seizures in the general population.