Help Seniors Live Better, Longer:

Prevent Brain Injury

Signs and Symptoms of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Because TBIs are often missed or misdiagnosed in older adults, watch for these signs and symptoms if you know the older adult in your care has fallen or has a fall-related injury, such as a hip fracture.

Symptoms of mild TBI include:

- Low-grade headache that won't go away
- Having more trouble than usual remembering things, paying attention or concentrating, organizing daily tasks, or making decisions and solving problems
- Slowness in thinking, speaking, acting, or reading
- Getting lost or easily confused
- Feeling tired all of the time, lack of energy or motivation
- Change in sleep pattern—sleeping much longer than before, having trouble sleeping
- Loss of balance, feeling light-headed or dizzy
- Increased sensitivity to sounds, lights, distractions
- Blurred vision or eyes that tire easily
- Loss of sense of taste or smell
- Ringing in the ears
- Change in sexual drive
- Mood changes like feeling sad, anxious, or listless, or becoming easily irritated or angry for little or no reason

A person with moderate or severe TBI may show the symptoms listed on the left, but may also have:

- A headache that gets worse or does not go away
- Repeated vomiting or nausea
- Convulsions or seizures
- Inability to wake up from sleep
- Dilation of one or both pupils
- Slurred speech
- Weakness or numbness in the arms or legs
- Loss of coordination
- Increased confusion, restlessness, or agitation

Older adults taking blood thinners (e.g. Coumadin) should be seen immediately by a health care provider if they have a bump or blow to the head, even if they do not have any of the symptoms listed above.

If You Think the Older Adult in Your Care Has a TBI, You Should:

Take him or her to a doctor. Tell the doctor about any prescription or over-the-counter medicines that the older adult takes. Also, tell the doctor if they take other blood thinners, such as aspirin, because they can increase the chance of complications.

For more information and to order materials free-of-charge, visit:
www.cdc.gov/BrainInjuryInSeniors

March 2008

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention