

Nutritional Needs of Traumatic Brain Injury Patients

by [John Demas](#) on 11/23/10

Once a traumatic brain injury patient's condition has been stabilized, a special nutritional plan must be created and put into immediate effect. According to New York neurosurgeon Robert Hartl, M.D. and other experts, there seems to be a direct relationship between long-term survival of [TBI](#) patients and early nutritional intervention.

In fact, a six-year, New York State trauma center study revealed that the [TBI patients](#) who did not receive adequate nutrition through stomach (or other) tubes during the first five days following their injuries were twice as likely to die than those who received such care. Furthermore, if these patients were not provided with the proper nutrition during the first seven days after they were injured, they were four times more like to die than the TBI patients who received such care.

Reasons Why TBI Patients Need Special Nutritional Care

- Since the entire brain of a TBI patient is thrust into an **accelerated metabolic state** (due to the increased release of catecholamines and cortisol), it becomes harder for the brain to properly metabolize glucose;
- This greatly increased metabolic state at least partially explains why it's often necessary to supply TBI patients with up to twice their normal daily caloric intake;
- Proper nutritional support becomes even more critical when TBI patients are also being treated for infections, wounds, secondary injuries and chronic medical conditions that obviously place their own unique demands on these patients' bodies;

- When seizures, migraines and other painful headaches are present, TBI patients require special dietary interventions to lessen their occurrence and duration (finding the proper balance between electrolytes and fluids is critical);
- Since TBI patients frequently suffer from depression, agitation and general mood disorders, their diets must supply plenty of protein and other key nutrients to offset these conditions;
- Given the common occurrence of dysphagia (swallowing problems) among TBI patients, they need nutrition that will help them avoid accidentally sending solid foods or liquids down into their windpipes (tracheas). Dysphagia can cause serious bacterial infections to develop in a TBI patient's lungs;
- Proper nutrition can also prevent the onset of diarrhea which can quickly destabilize a TBI patient's overall medical condition.

Over time, as TBI patients regain physical strength and certain motor skills, new adjustments must be made to their daily diets. Likewise, those TBI patients who may never experience major functional improvements will also require careful dietary monitoring since their bodies will keep trying to find new ways to accommodate their more sedentary lifestyles.

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