

## Age-related Brain Injury

Ageing is a risk factor for acquiring a brain injury, particularly over the age of 65.

As we get older, our chance of developing dementia rises. So too does the likelihood of falls that result in brain injury. We might not be able to stop either from happening, but there are ways to reduce the risk and manage symptoms.

### Age-related cognitive decline

The effect that ageing has on mental abilities is generally very mild. Working memory, attention skills and the ability to multitask can deteriorate over time without affecting a person's ability to live a normal, independent life.

Some people will experience Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI), which is more pronounced than the normal signs of ageing but not severe enough to interfere with everyday tasks. MCI is divided into two categories:

- **Amnesic:** memory impairment is the main symptom
- **Non-amnesic:** a cognitive skill other than memory is the main symptom, e.g. attention, language, visual or spatial perception, complex thinking

Cognitive and physical assessments are used to diagnose MCI, as well as brain scans such as CT, MRI and PET.

MCI can be the start of dementia, and it affects thinking, emotions and behaviour in similar but less severe ways.

While some people with MCI will see improvement over time, others will stabilise and a proportion will go on to develop dementia.

### Risk factors and how to avoid them

Although some people have younger-onset dementia, symptoms usually appear later in life, which means age is a big risk factor. Having an acquired brain injury also puts people in a higher risk category but it should be remembered that dementia is not inevitable or a natural part of ageing.

There are simple ways to reduce risk, like staying physically and mentally active, maintaining friendships and eating healthy food. Not smoking and having regular medical check-ups is also important to avoid an increased risk associated with high blood pressure and cholesterol, type 2 diabetes and obesity.



### Traumatic Brain Injury due to falls

Getting older often means losing some of our physical strength, sense of balance and vision, all of which can put people at an extra risk of falling. Australian Health and Welfare studies show that head injury is the most common injury in people over 65 who are admitted to hospital after a fall (AIHW, 2019).

Slower reaction times, conditions like dementia and even dizziness due to medication can all play a part in increasing the risk of a traumatic brain injury due to falls.

#### Tips to reduce the risk of falls:

- stay active to improve physical strength and balance
- wear footwear that is safe and doesn't slip off easily
- make sure floor surfaces are safe, e.g. rugs cannot slip
- make walkways and stairs easier to see with lights.

#### REFERENCES:

AIHW: Pointer S 2019. *Trends in hospitalised injury due to falls in older people, 2007-08 to 2016-17*. Injury research and statistics series no. 126. Cat. no. INJCAT 206. Canberra: AIHW.