

# Preventing falls and brain injury

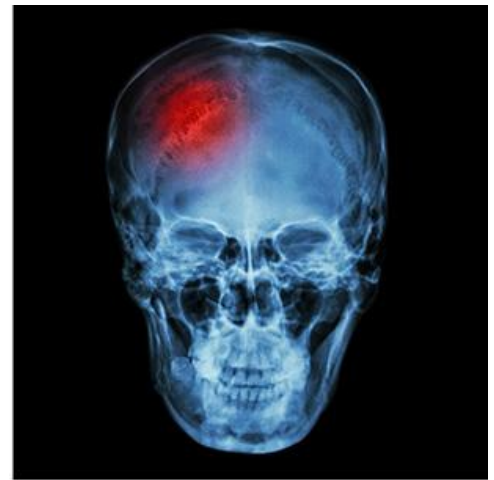
*The Health Column*

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Soon you may notice people walking around wearing distinctive bright blue beanies. Those people are joining BANGONABEANIE – a national campaign to raise awareness for Brain Injury Awareness Week, which runs from 17–23 August 2015.

The objective of Brain Injury Awareness Week is to increase education and awareness of brain injury, raise funds, and develop sustainable and mutually-beneficial partnerships with related organisations across the country.

Brain injury is common, affecting over 1 in 12 Australians, often with no visible signs that they are experiencing ongoing issues. While the outcome of the injury depends largely on the nature and severity of the injury itself, appropriate treatment plays a vital role in the level of recovery.



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The terms ‘head injury’ and ‘acquired brain injury’ (ABI), are widely used to describe all types of brain damage which occur after birth (with the exception of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder – FASD).

ABI is a complex and individual condition. The damage can be caused through a variety of reasons including accident or trauma, stroke or other cardiovascular disease, alcohol or drug abuse. It can also occur through diseases of the brain, such as Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), and dementia. ABI is distinct from intellectual disability. People with a brain injury may have difficulty controlling, coordinating and communicating their thoughts and actions but generally retain their intellectual abilities.

One of the biggest causes of ABI is accident or trauma – known as traumatic brain injury (TBI). Such injuries are the result of a blow to the head or other external force. While traffic accidents, sports injuries and assault account for some of these cases, a significant number of these injuries are caused by falls.

Falls are the most common accidents among older people. Changes to eyesight and balance, weaker muscles, stiff joints and slow reflexes can make people unsteady as they age. This can increase the many tripping hazards at home and in public places. It is important to ensure you have good lighting, wear supportive, non-slippery footwear and consider putting handrails around

your home. Regular exercise at a moderate level on all or most days of the week is also important to improve flexibility, balance and muscle strength. As always, prevention is better than cure.

Certain medical conditions or medicines can also increase the risk of having a fall. There is a higher risk of falls when taking multiple medicines, starting a new medicine, or changing the dose of your medicine. Your pharmacist can help to identify medicine-related problems and provide advice on how to reduce or avoid side effects.

To reduce the chances of having a fall:

- manage your medicines and medical conditions carefully
- understand the effects of your medicines
- move carefully – don't rush
- exercise regularly
- wear supportive shoes
- keep your home environment safe
- ask for help if you feel unsteady
- limit alcohol intake.

Falls are a major cause of brain injury and preventing falls is an important health consideration. Your pharmacist can provide information on medical conditions, medicine side effects, mobility aids and other products which may assist in preventing falls. You can get more detailed information on preventing falls from the Self Care Fact Card titled *Preventing falls* available from pharmacies providing the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's Self Care health information.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to [www.psa.org.au](http://www.psa.org.au) 'Supporting practice' then 'Self Care', and then 'Find a Self Care pharmacy'.