

Story Idea: *Brain Injuries High Among U.S. Troops*

Contact: Kimberli Meadows, 301-918-3747, kmeadows@efa.org

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, increase their risks of developing the neurological seizure condition epilepsy, and potentially cost the nation billions. 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.

Story Resources

- [Brain Injuries High Among Iraq Casualties](#) (*Army News Service*).
- [A Shock Wave of Brain Injuries](#) (*Washington Post*).
- [Brain injuries lead Iraq war injuries](#) (*United Press International*).
- [AAN Member Testifies on Veterans' TBI/Epilepsy Issues Before Congress](#) (*American Academy of Neurology*).
- **The Epilepsy Index**, an educational Web resource for general epilepsy information, www.epilepsyfoundation.org/answerplace/index.cfm.

Suggested Interview Questions

- What are the possible cost consequences to the U.S. due to TBI among soldiers in the current conflict? What will the future cost be if the war were to end today? If it were to end in 5 years?
- How many veterans might manifest epilepsy within the next 5 years? 10 years? 15 years?
- What can we do to best prepare today's soldiers and veterans for the possibility of their developing epilepsy later in life?

- Why are the risks for epilepsy even greater in this war than in prior wars?

Interview Opportunities

- Eric Hargis, president and chief executive officer, the Epilepsy Foundation.
- Physician specialist.
- U.S. soldier who sustained a TBI that led to epilepsy in Iraq.

Fast Facts

- Among 105 casualties assessed between June and October 2003, doctors discovered 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.
- Annually in the United States, 1.5 million people sustain traumatic brain injuries, while 50,000 die from such injuries, according to the National Brain Injury Research, Treatment, & Training Foundation.
- 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.
- With proper seizure-controlling medicines, most people with epilepsy can lead normal lives full of every day experiences.

About the Epilepsy Foundation

The Epilepsy Foundation, a national nonprofit with affiliated organizations throughout the United States, has led the fight against epilepsy since 1968. The Epilepsy Foundation will ensure that people with seizures are able to participate in all life experiences and will prevent, control and cure epilepsy through services, education, advocacy and research. For additional information, please visit www.epilepsyfoundation.org.