

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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“Concussion Risks and Terry Bradshaw”

With the return of football season, we need to have an increased awareness of the dangers of concussions. People who sustain a concussion may be at increased risk for a wide range of neurological and psychological conditions later in life. A new study reveals that people with a concussion diagnosis are more likely to develop mood and anxiety disorders, dementia, and Parkinson's disease than individuals in the control group. In 2011, Hall of Fame quarterback, Terry Bradshaw said he is feeling the effects of numerous concussions sustained during his NFL career. The 62-year-old Shreveport native said he has been having short-term memory loss as well as the loss of hand-eye coordination. Bradshaw told KTBS-TV that he sustained at least six concussions, plus an unknown number of instances where there was a blow to the head that would require him to "clear the cobwebs." Bradshaw penned a deal with CBS Sports soon after his retirement to become an NFL analyst and is currently the co-host of Fox NFL Sunday. He has an estimated net worth of \$15 million. Terry Bradshaw also has clinical depression, diagnosed in 1999. He takes medication to properly balance the serotonin in his brain. Based on self-report of concussion or postimpact symptoms, tight ends and defensive linemen have the highest rates of diagnosed concussions in college football. People who have had a second concussion are more likely to develop dementia than people who have had only one. In addition, having three or more concussions is associated with a greater risk of mood and anxiety disorders and Parkinson's disease than a single concussion. However, many of these concussion studies are observational and can't prove a causal relationship between concussions and any of the outcomes of interest. Another new study shows that people who have had concussions sometimes develop long-term aftereffects, including sleep disturbances. Parents and coaches need to be able to recognize danger signs such as a change in the athlete's behavior, thinking or physical functioning. In the first days following a severe concussion, it is common to experience headaches, nausea, dizziness, fatigue, an increased need for sleep or difficulty sleeping. An increased need for sleep, poor sleep quality, daytime drowsiness and fatigue occurs much more often and lasts longer after concussions than after other types of injuries. Playing with a concussion can lead to long-term problems, even death. Today we don't have a standard treatment that we know works for all patients with long-term pain or problems following a concussion.

In the America that I love, we must emphasize that athletes frequently do not recognize their own limitations, especially following a concussion or they try to "push their limits." Be careful and try to avoid head injuries.

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