

TIPS



for Living With Suspected CTE

Chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) is a progressive degenerative brain disease found in athletes, military personnel, and people with repetitive brain trauma. Experts are unsure of why certain people who have repeated head injuries develop CTE. The number of injuries and the amount of force required to cause this disorder also are uncertain. The following tips can help if you suspect that you may have CTE.

Treat head injuries seriously. Every head injury should be evaluated by a medical professional. CTE may cause atrophy in the brain. People with CTE also may show signs of another neurodegenerative disease (eg, Alzheimer’s disease, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or Parkinson’s disease).

Talk to your doctor. Doctors suspect CTE in people who have had several head injuries, have symptoms typical of the disorder, and do not have another condition that better explains their symptoms. Tests cannot confirm the diagnosis of CTE, as the disease only can be diagnosed during an autopsy.

Confront suicidal thoughts. People with CTE may be at increased risk of suicide. If you have thoughts of harming yourself, call 911 or a suicide hotline such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).

Be aware of symptoms. Symptoms of CTE include memory loss, paranoia, confusion, impaired judgment, aggression, impulse control problems, depression, and

eventually progressive dementia. Symptoms can begin to appear months, years, or even decades after trauma has ended.

Remember to remember. See your doctor if you have concerns about your memory. Writing things down can help you maintain a sense of control over your life. You can keep a notebook, use voice memos, or create calendar reminders on your phone.

Notice impulsive behavior. CTE can damage parts of the brain that regulate impulsive behaviors. Be aware of habits such as gambling; overspending; and using drugs, alcohol, or other addictive substances to cope with problems.

Establish a routine. Creating a structured environment that includes planning tasks to complete and goals to accomplish can help with creating a sense of stability. Approaching one task at a time also can make life more manageable.

Seek support when needed. Remember that reaching out to family and friends and asking for help is not a sign of weakness. Sharing your experiences and challenges with someone may help.

This page is part of an ongoing series of practical tips for patients with neurologic disorders. If you have compiled clinically relevant tips that you wish to share, please contact the editor at info@neurologyreviews.com.

Tips for Patients are available for download at www.neurologyreviews.com.

