



# TBI News & Views

A publication of the Northern New Jersey Traumatic Brain Injury System

## GIVING BACK HELPS TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY SURVIVOR MOVE FORWARD

### Lynn Webb's unique perspective and empathy prompts her to advocate for other patients

By Stephanie Spivak, Research Assistant, Center for Traumatic Brain Injury

Lynn Webb is a brain injury survivor and an active, impactful member of her community, volunteering and working with multiple organizations throughout the years. At the time of her injury, she was a seminarian at the Lutheran Theological Seminary and working for the Educational Testing Service as a learning and development specialist. It was during one of these classes that Lynn's life changed; she fell and hit her head on a metal door twice, which left her with permanent brain damage.

After her initial recovery, she struggled to put words and sentences together and started battling headaches. Lynn stated, "I never had a headache before, and now I had three different ones at the same time. One was throbbing, one felt like electrical zapping, and one was continuous pain."

Lynn had a lot of new challenges to overcome in the wake of her brain injury. She credits her faith in God and the various cognitive therapies she underwent to help her recover. Notably, she began studying Hebrew as she discovered that learning a new language can help the brain create new neural pathways, allowing her to continue to improve her ability to think and speak, as well as enhance her daily life.

Following her brain injury, Lynn decided to continue her studies and became a chaplain upon completing a master's degree in divinity. After witnessing a patient struggle to lift his head because of the bright lights around him, Lynn began to understand that her experience had granted her a unique perspective and empathy that would allow her to advocate for patients like him. She could relate to the pain he felt and his psychological difficulties adjusting to a new life. She was inspired to advocate for other people with brain injuries and became a voice and source of comfort for them.

Since then, Lynn created a spirituality group at the Morristown Medical Center in addition to being a chaplain. She volunteers at the Washington Woman's Club at St. Luke's Lutheran



Lynn Webb has been a member of Kessler Foundation's traumatic brain injury consumer advisory board for approximately six years.

Church in Washington, NJ, her local community pantry, and Habitat for Humanity. She is also a member of the Brain Injury Association of New Jersey (BIANJ) and received the BIANJ Gala Volunteer Committee Founder's Award in 2016. Lynn has been a member of Kessler Foundation's traumatic brain injury consumer advisory board for approximately six years. In addition to her volunteerism, Lynn loves quilting and proudly presented President Dr. Bruce Murphy of Centenary University with a quilt of valor in July 2023. ■



After her own brain injury, Lynn Webb was inspired to advocate for other people with TBI and became a voice and source of comfort for them.

# WARDING OFF SLEEP ISSUES AFTER BRAIN INJURY

## A key component of recovery includes a good night's sleep

By Paige Rusnock, Research Coordinator, Center for Traumatic Brain Injury Research

Sleep is essential to our mental and physical health. A key component of traumatic brain injury (TBI) recovery is a good night's sleep, but unfortunately, individuals who have experienced TBI often report an increase in sleep issues.

Many different kinds of sleep disturbances can occur after TBI depending on which areas of the brain are affected. TBI can change the chemical mechanisms of the brain, and individuals with TBI may be unable to adequately start and stop the sleep cycle. In addition to altering natural sleep processes, pain stemming from the injury and commonly prescribed medications may prevent individuals with TBI from falling and staying asleep.

The most common sleep disorders reported after TBI include insomnia, excessive daytime sleepiness, inconsistent sleep patterns, and narcolepsy. Other common sleep syndromes are restless leg, bruxism, sleep apnea, periodic limb movement, and sleepwalking. The inability to concentrate due to fatigue, heightened anxiety, or deep depression from low-quality sleep can be detrimental to a person's work and personal life.

Sleep is also extremely important for memory consolidation. Adequate sleep can enhance memory recall and motor memory, including recalling names and important dates as well as

completing tasks such as buttoning shirts, tying shoes, and zipping jackets. A short, 45-minute nap during the day may heighten these motor skills as well.

After admission to a brain injury unit, the rehabilitation team includes sleep as part of the patient's health and well-being. Team members track the patient's sleep/wake cycle and develop a treatment plan to normalize that function. Treatment may also include administering medications to help the patient fall asleep at night and/or stay awake during the day to make it easier to participate in therapies and activities.

After discharge, adopting new habits can enhance a TBI survivor's sleep pattern. A great place to start is by creating a routine that includes going to bed and waking up at the same time every day. Caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, and sugar should be avoided five hours before bedtime. Exercise should be incorporated daily, but not within two hours of bedtime. Furthermore, phone and computer screens should be shut off at least 30 minutes before bedtime. If these suggestions don't help regulate sleep patterns, a trusted physician may prescribe new medications or alter existing dosages or schedules to help improve the situation. ■

## Good Rest is The Best Foundation for Recovery From TBI

### Suggestions for Better Sleep:

- **Go to bed at the same time every night and set your alarm to wake at the same time each morning.**
- **Follow a bedtime routine (e.g., lay out your clothes for the morning, brush your teeth, and then listen to relaxing music for 10 minutes before turning out the light).**
- **Avoid caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, and sugar five hours before bedtime.**
- **Avoid eating before bedtime to allow time to digest the food.**
- **Do not eat, read, or watch TV in bed.**
- **Create a restful environment in the bedroom protected from distractions, noise, extreme temperatures, and light.**



# LoveYourBrain FOSTERS CONNECTION AND RECOVERY AFTER TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

## Nonprofit focuses on improving quality of life and brain health awareness

By Rachel Petri, Communication and Social Media Manager, LoveYourBrain



In 2009, professional snowboarder Kevin Pearce suffered a near-fatal traumatic brain injury (TBI) while training for the Winter Olympics. His older brother Adam put everything in his life on hold to care for Kevin. Together, they discovered the power of yoga, mindfulness, and community, and in 2014, founded the nonprofit LoveYourBrain. The organization's mission is to improve quality of life for people affected by TBI and raise awareness about brain health.

TBI is common, chronic, and complex, making comprehensive rehabilitation services essential – yet options are often limited. Through accessible, evidence-based programming, LoveYourBrain has helped more than 37,000 people rebuild the balanced mind, healthy body, and social connections needed to live well after TBI.

Pioneering this work is Dr. Kyla Pearce, the organization's senior director of programs and research. Dr. Pearce, who is married to Adam, blends her expertise as a researcher and yoga and mindfulness teacher to innovate holistic programs that optimize brain health. "Because of the benefits Kevin and Adam found through yoga and meditation, we saw a tremendous opportunity to build resilience and connection within the TBI community," shared Dr. Pearce.

LoveYourBrain now serves people in 26 countries worldwide through its foundational, online mindset program and residential and virtual retreats for TBI survivors and caregivers. Also, its clinical affiliate program brings LoveYourBrain's curriculum to top hospitals and rehabilitation centers in the U.S. and Canada. The nonprofit developed an all-encompassing meditation and yoga library and courses for TBI. The team has trained more than 2,600 clinicians, yoga teachers, and TBI survivors by delivering accessible mindfulness, yoga, and psychoeducation through one of the first TBI-specific, certification-level yoga and facilitation programs.

Through partnerships with Dartmouth, UNC Chapel Hill, and the Edward Hines, Jr. Veterans Affairs Hospital, LoveYourBrain pioneers research on how yoga, mindfulness, and community programs benefit TBI. Eight published studies have investigated the benefit of the nonprofit's programming on TBI and other neurological conditions.

"Having all LoveYourBrain programs research-backed contributes to the science of yoga," said Dr. Pearce, "making evidence-based practices more widely accessible."

This work is life-changing for the thousands of individuals LoveYourBrain serves each year. "My doctors didn't have satisfying answers for me," asserted Allison C., a program participant. "LoveYourBrain made me feel seen, loved, and empowered to support others in their own journeys of healing and post-traumatic growth."

Learn more about the nonprofit's free programs and get involved by visiting [loveyourbrain.com](http://loveyourbrain.com). ■



**Dr. Kyla Pearce of LoveYourBrain Foundation uses the power of yoga, mindfulness, and community to help people affected by TBI.**



**LoveYourBrain programming has helped more than 37,000 people rebuild the balanced mind, healthy body, and social connections needed to live well after TBI.**

# NNJTBIS

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## TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY FACT SHEETS

The Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center summarizes cognitive problems that can occur after TBI in its fact sheets, which can be found by scanning the QR code on the right.



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Kessler Foundation research helps people with disabilities live better lives.

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