

The Nature of the Medulla Oblongata

The brain is the center of the nervous system and helps regulate all the systems and functions of the body. The brain interprets all internal and external signals and provides the correct reaction through the use of neurons, cells that make up the brain. Using the spinal cord and the nervous system, it relays messages back and forth to different parts of the body. The brain is connected to the spinal cord by the brain stem. All motor and sensory information passes from the brain to the rest of the body. The brain stem is composed of three main sections: the midbrain, the pons, and the medulla oblongata.

The medulla oblongata is the lowest part of the brain stem, and arguably one of the most important parts of the body as it controls many autonomic functions like: breathing, digestion, and heart function. Nerve fibers also cross over at the medulla oblongata, which is why the right hemisphere of the brain controls the left side of the body and vice versa.

The Symptoms of Injury to the Medulla Oblongata

The medulla oblongata controls automatic bodily functions, so injury to this part of the brain is often fatal. However, if an individual is fortunate enough to survive an injury, then several severe complications can arise, including:

- Numbness and paralysis of the palate which can cause drooling;
- Inability to rotate the head;
- Rapidly fluctuating heart and breathing rate; and,
- Kidney failure or the inability for the body to process toxins.

The Causes and Treatment of Injury to the Medulla Oblongata

The most common causes of damage to the medulla oblongata are auto accidents, violence against others, sports, and slip and falls. Damage can be done to the medulla oblongata through either blunt force trauma (such as a club) or penetrating trauma (such as a bullet). Another common cause of injury to the medulla oblongata is hypoxia, or prolonged lack of oxygen to the brain, which can be caused by drowning or choking. Harmful chemicals and

toxins can also cause a tumor to grow on the brainstem.

Initial diagnosis of an injury to the medulla oblongata will be done with an MRI scan. CT scans and x-rays might also be conducted in order to diagnose any damage to the skull, including dents or any bone fragments or splintering. Surgery will be required in order to remove possible bones fragments from brain tissue, stop bleeding, remove any pools of blood, or any number of other complications from trauma. However, just as each person is unique so is each brain and each brain injury.

Although the medulla oblongata may be physically mended, the brain stem often does not regain full functionality. If it is damaged recovery will often require a multi-disciplinary team that can include:

- A neuropsychologist, skilled in knowing all the specific processes and behaviors of the brain and able to assess the level of mental competence a brain damaged patient still has;

- A speech consult, skilled in communication rehabilitation will help the patient with their skills of expression, comprehension and communication;

- An occupational therapist, skilled in helping individual's regain the ability to do small meaningful tasks; and,

- A psychiatrist, skilled in helping individuals deal with emotional distress like depression.

In addition, damage to the medulla oblongata can require the need for a ventilator or other equipment to keep the body alive. While some individuals may recover others may remain entirely brain dead or in a persistent vegetative state.

The costs associated with injuries to the medulla oblongata can be extensive. In addition to the retention of many specialists, as well as the costs of surgery and hospital bills, individuals may need many years of rehabilitative care. Those who do recover may not be able to work for at least 6 months to a year and many will lose their jobs due to their handicap. If you or a family member is suffering from an injury to the medulla oblongata through the fault of someone else

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. All legal consultations are held strictly confidential.

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