


HEALTHCHECK 

Local specialist weighs in on brain injuries

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PHILADELPHIA - March 19, 2009 (WPVI) -- Anyone who skis has probably fallen. It doesn't seem possible that what seems like a minor fall could result in a major brain injury. But a specialist tells Action News it's not unheard of.

While the specific medical details about what happened to actress Natasha Richardson have not been released, Dr. Doug Smith of the University of Pennsylvania says even a minor fall can cause the brain to shift quickly inside the skull.

"We have a syndrome called 'talk & die,' "says Dr. Smith.

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With that syndrome he says the brain itself may not be damaged, but small blood vessels at the top of the brain can tear.

If this happens, the victim seems fine initially, talking and going about their activities... as was reportedly the case with Richardson.

But as time goes on, blood accumulates and clots at the top of the skull.

Dr. Smith says, "The clot that forms is pushing down on the brain, and there's no place to go, but to squash the brain."

The downward force presses onto the brain stem, affecting areas that control our breathing, heart rate, and other important functions.

So a person loses consciousness.

Dr. Smith says getting prompt medical attention after a head injury can catch the bleeding early.

"If you are in an emergency room, and people are monitoring you, they can catch it in time to relieve that pressure," he says.

He says there's no guarantee a helmet will prevent brain injuries like Richardson's, but they're a good precaution for any activity with risk.

"So biking, rollerblading, skiing, anything where you take a risk, you should wear a helmet," says Dr. Smith.

If someone may have hit their head during a fall, be on the lookout for signs of brain injury, such as

*Headaches

*Nausea or vomiting

*Dizziness or loss of vision

*Amnesia for events just before & just after the injury

*Confusion

In children, the signs can be different, and include a refusal to eat, sleepiness, and lack of interest in favorite activities.

For more information on brain injuries, visit [Center for Brain Injury and Repair at the University of Pennsylvania](#).

For details on recognizing brain injuries, visit [Mayo Clinic Center for Traumatic Brain Injury](#).

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