Management of Head Injury

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I. Initial Management

A. Airway
   - Intubate if:
     1. Airway is inadequate
     2. Patient remains unresponsive
     3. Patient requires sedation for diagnostic maneuvers
   *If C-spine injury is suspected, intubation should be performed by the most experienced person available. Use techniques that cause the least movement of head and neck.

B. Breathing
   - Maintain PaO₂ at normal levels (>35 mmHg)
   - Obtain ABGs or end tidal CO₂ regularly
   - Check ABGs or end tidal CO₂

C. Circulation
   - Shock is usually due to bleeding from other sources
   - Control bleeding
   - Fluid resuscitate with isotonic saline solutions as dictated by other body injuries
   - Shock will worsen the head injury (keep systolic blood pressure >90 mmHg)

C1 Cervical Spine
   - Immobilize head and neck
   - Obtain C-spine film as soon as possible

II. Initial Neuro-Assessment

Key History
- Mechanism of injury
- Response at scene

Examination: Glasgow Coma Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best Eye Opening</th>
<th>Best Verbal Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 Spontaneously</td>
<td>5 Converses, oriented</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Voice</td>
<td>4 Converses, disoriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 To pain</td>
<td>3 Inappropriate words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Not at all</td>
<td>2 Incomprehensible sounds</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 No verbalization</td>
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Best Motor Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6 Obeys</th>
<th>Follows motor commands</th>
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<tr>
<td>5 Localizes</td>
<td>Clearly pushes painful stimuli away</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Withdraws</td>
<td>Only withdraws arm or leg to painful stimuli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Abnormal flexion (de corticate)</td>
<td>Flexion of arms with extension of legs to stimuli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Abnormal extension (de cerebrate)</td>
<td>Extension of all extremities to painful stimuli</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Flaccid</td>
<td>No response to painful stimuli</td>
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Glasgow Coma Scale Total = 3–15

Note Symmetry of Motor Examination
- Do both arms move the same and equally strong?
- Do both legs move the same and equally strong?
- Asymmetrical motor responses should increase suspicion of an intracranial mass lesion that requires immediate operation.

Examine Pupils and Record

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<tr>
<th>SIZE</th>
<th>SHAPE*</th>
<th>REACTION*</th>
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*An oval pupil or sluggish reaction may indicate impending herniation.

III. Immediate Neurosurgical Management

Obtain CT scan of head if:
- Patient is comatose
- GCS<13
- Lateralizing neuro-examination reveals—unequal pupils
  —focal weakness
- Patient with abnormal level of consciousness is to be sedated for diagnostics or treatment

Obtain neurosurgical consultation if:
- Patient is comatose
- GCS<13
- Lateralizing neuro-examination reveals—unequal pupils
  —focal weakness
- CT scan is abnormal

IV. Recognize and Treat Herniation

A. Look for:
   - Sudden deterioration in level of consciousness (if patient initially responsive)
   - Dilating pupil
   - Deterioration of motor response (especially if on side opposite dilating pupil)

B. Treatment
   - Contact neurosurgeon
   - Hyperventilation (Paco₂=25–30 mmHg)
   - Mannitol, 1 g/kg IV push (if BP stable and after neurosurgical consultation)
   - Immediate CT scan or take to operating room for intracranial operation (as directed by neurosurgeon)

V. Other Considerations

A. Lateral C-spine X ray (C1–C7/T1).
   - Spine fracture can be present in 5%–20% of patients with severe head injury.

B. Control bleeding.

C. Immobilize obvious extremely fractures.

D. Remove from spine board, but log-roll until entire spine is cleared radiographically, especially if C-spine fracture is present. 5%–10% of patients with one spine fracture may have another spine fracture.

VI. Pitfalls

1. Assume a spine injury until it is ruled out.

2. Use an orogastric tube, not a nasogastric tube, if an anterior basilar skull fracture or midface fracture is suspected.

3. Hyperextension injury of head and neck or direct trauma to neck can cause a carotid artery injury.

4. Systolic blood pressure <90 mmHg can lead to secondary brain injury.

5. Never attribute neurologic abnormalities solely to the presence of drugs or alcohol.