



Brain Injury Improves With Hyperbaric Oxygen

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Patients with long-standing traumatic brain injury show a general improvement of speech, memory and attention after undergoing a series of hyperbaric oxygen therapy treatments.

Hyperbaric oxygen therapy is a technique in which patients breathe pure oxygen in a chamber with a higher-than-normal atmospheric pressure. Hyperbaric oxygen therapy is commonly used to treat people suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning or divers with decompression sickness. Initially, five of the 11 patients, at least 3 years post-brain injury had 80 sessions in a hyperbaric unit. After a 5-month rest period, those five patients underwent another 40 hyperbaric sessions. The remaining six patients, serving as controls, did not undergo hyperbaric oxygen therapy. There was no change in the blood flow of the six control patients during the study period. However, patients who did receive the hyperbaric oxygen therapy showed increased blood flow in specific areas of the brain, as well as improvements in speech and memory functions. The improvements in these patients peaked at 80 hyperbaric oxygen sessions, and repeating the therapy every one to two weeks maintained improvement. The therapy sessions were also used to treat individuals with stroke, cerebral palsy, dementia, near-drowning and chronic carbon monoxide poisoning patients. Those patients were treated a year after the brain injury occurred. The patients had no other treatment options. Patients with the least loss of function following injury showed the greatest improvement with hyperbaric oxygen therapy. According to the researchers, it's not clear why hyperbaric oxygen therapy helped patients. "There is clinical and animal data to suggest that it might help, but the studies are not conclusive," said the president of the Undersea and Hyperbaric Medical Society. It's fertile ground for research.