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BUFFALO FROM PAGE 1

feels it is not her place to discuss Native American beliefs.

"It has been told to me," Dena says, "that there was a prophecy about the birth of a white buffalo calf. That the white buffalo is very significant in the world—that they would appear during a time of chaos and disaster. They are a symbol of the coming of a new era, bringing peace, balance and harmony to the world."

"My husband and I were very blessed," Dena says. Theirs is the only herd of white buffalo in the world. "If the buffalo represent world peace, we need a lot of them. Once everything is settled and the buffalo are available for viewing we will have more information to share. Those with questions may call White Buffalo Sanctuary at 541-846-0242."

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EARL'S PEARLS

Helmets restricted to those who have something to save

BY EARL SHOWERMAN, M.D.

During my years working as an ER doc, I had occasion to see many patients with all manner of head injuries. Most commonly, folks had minor bumps on their head or concussions, which were characterized by a short-term loss of consciousness and rapid return to awareness. Sometimes people experienced a brief period of amnesia after a concussion. Most patients recover from minor head injuries within one week with rest, over-the-counter pain medicine like Acetaminophen (Tylenol) and ice packs applied to bruised areas of the scalp or face to help to reduce swelling and pain. Patients who have had concussions are usually advised to avoid activities that could lead to a jolt or blow to the head. Aspirin, because it increases the risk for bleeding, and alcohol should also be avoided after a head injury.

Worrisome symptoms that should prompt you to go to the emergency room right away after a concussion include a worsening or severe headache not relieved by pain medicine, vomiting more than once, mental confusion, personality changes, loss of balance, increasing weakness, sleepiness, blackouts, or seizures. A clear or bloody drainage from the nose or ear is also cause for great concern. Medical evaluation including a CT scan may be needed to evaluate the possibility of a skull fracture or internal bleeding. It is extremely rare that a concussion-type head injury requires hospital care or surgery.

Even minor concussions, however, may cause people to have persistent headaches and feel weak, dizzy, and depressed for a week or more after the injury. Fortunately, this condition is self-limited and does not mean there is any problem with the brain. No special treatment is usually required because post-concussion syndrome gets better with rest and mild pain medicine. After a concussion, you should not drive a car, ride a bike, or operate dangerous equipment until you are fully recovered. Your ability to react normally may be impaired for days after a concussion. If any head injury symptoms last for more than a week, however, medical evaluation is usually recommended.

People who have repeated head injuries are at greater risk for serious neurological complications in later years. Mohammed Ali's Parkinson's Disease and the post-traumatic dementia that has been reported among retired professional football players is clear evidence that repeated trauma can have far reaching consequences. Prevention and protection are the keys to avoiding any of these problems. I can still remember the horror I felt after being concussed during a pick-up football game in college when I took a knee to the back of my head. For several hours I could not remember what courses I was taking, even though finals were only weeks away.

Although Oregon has had a universal helmet law for motorcyclists for decades, there are many other high risk sports and activities for which widespread helmet use has been rather late in arriving. Biking, boarding, skiing and skating have all become quite popular in recent decades, but helmet use has lagged behind the other technological improvements in these sports. There is at least a 50% chance you will hit your head if you are involved in a bicycle or motorcycle accident. The chances of having a bad head injury are reduced by at least 75% if you are wearing a proper helmet at the time of the accident. I have had at least four occasions over the past 30 years when my bike helmet made a big difference in my recovery from a fall.

When you buy a helmet, be sure to get one designed for the activity you will be doing. For biking, look for a helmet that has ANSI or DOT approval and be sure it fits properly, snug enough to stay on and secured by a chinstrap. The helmet should have a hard outer shell and a hard, styrofoam-like inner lining because soft foam inside a hard shell is less effective in preventing

brain injury. Remember to wear your helmet all the time when you ride. One of my standard lines in counseling concussed patients in the ER was that the only people who wear helmets are those with something to preserve. I also used to suggest that the brain was the only major organ that could not be transplanted.

Compliance with helmet use can be an issue among experienced athletes as well as novices. I knew a very bright and physically fit nurse some years ago who sported a biker's cap on her long rides, until one day she fell off her bike on a fast downhill when she lost her balance trying to keep her cap from blowing off with the wind. She separated her shoulder in the fall and had to wear an immobilizer for six weeks, but the next time I saw her riding, she was sporting the proper headgear. Even a family member with a PhD in history refused to wear a helmet on his rides to Jacksonville and back, only adopting the added safety of a bike helmet when he became a father and realized more was at stake here than a great workout and the sensation of wind blowing through his hair.

Helmet use among skiers and snowboarders has dramatically increased in recent years. I was myself slow to adopt the habit until one day several years ago when I fell backwards on an icy patch striking the back of my head. I was stunned, there was a brief darkening of the light and I felt dizzy for about a minute. My next run was to the ski lodge to purchase protection. Ironically, I was skiing with an ER doc friend who was wearing a helmet, and who, for at least that day, evidently had more to protect than I did. Since then several close friends I was skiing with had the identical experience of having to be concussed to wake up to the importance of head protection when one hurdles down a mountain. Why is it that intelligent people literally have to have their senses knocked into them? I have no doubt that the actress Natasha Richardson's untimely death from a ski accident head injury would have been entirely preventable with a proper ski helmet.

Pruning large branches and felling trees is another high-risk activity that should warrant both eye and head protection. I have so much respect for my chainsaw and for the forces it releases when a tree falls, that I always wear my heaviest boots and my Stihl chaps and trusty helmet whenever it's time to clear dead trees or collect firewood.

Whether you are a biker, boarder, skier, or feller, proper head protection is highly beneficial. Ultimately, wearing a helmet is not a scientific or medical issue. The facts are in: Helmets work to prevent death and disability. Except for motorcyclists and young bicyclists who are required by law to wear proper protection, adults are free to choose whether they use a helmet or not. Too often, in these activities, the unexpected occurs and we crash land. By wearing a helmet, you increase your chances of actually remembering the event and of feeling grateful that you were smart enough to get the message before the earth pounded some reality into you.

I grew up in 'Hockeytown' and this year's Stanley Cup Finals between the Red Wings and Penguins is absorbing my interest. I have been very impressed by the play of Wings' rookie, Justin Abdelkader, who scored his first two NHL goals in the third period of the first games and sealed the deal on Detroit's twin 3-1 victories. Abdelkader is a Michigan kid and was just recently brought up to the NHL because of serious injuries to a number of Detroit's All Stars. Then a nurse friend sent me this factoid by email, one that I refuse to confirm: "The first testicular guard 'cup' was used in Hockey in 1874 and the first helmet was used in 1974. It took 100 years for men to realize that the brain is also important."

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