

Dr. Nicole Eastman's Story

Finding Hope Through Connecting with Others

Dr. Nicole Eastman never imagined she would be on disability at age 30...or host a blog about her traumatic brain injury (TBI).

The TBI survivor and social media enthusiast is providing hope and inspiration to countless individuals who have been touched by brain injuries. At the same time, she is helping herself heal from an event that changed her fast-paced life in an instant.

Just 2 weeks after her marriage, while driving to work at the hospital where she was completing her residency, Dr. Eastman was struck multiple times by a semi-truck. Upon arrival at the scene, police were shocked that she had survived. They were even more surprised to see she had no cuts and no bruises—no visible signs of injury.

Dr. Eastman was treated by emergency department staff and released that same day.

"I experienced a headache and back pain at the accident scene; however, once I arrived home the pain increased to the point that it was unbearable." she recalled.

Dr. Eastman had sustained a closed-TBI, an injury to the brain caused by movement of the brain within the skull.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), each year nearly 1.4 million Americans are seen in emergency departments for TBI alone or in conjunction with other injuries or conditions. Previously referred to as the "Silent Epidemic," individuals with this injury may not have any visible scars, and symptoms may not show up or be noticed until hours or days later. Still, TBI can cause short or long-term problems seriously affecting thinking, learning, memory, and/or emotions. A TBI can affect all aspects of an individual's life, as well as their loved ones.

Like other TBI survivors, for Dr. Eastman, her injury meant her life had to take on a much slower pace, and everyday things became difficult.

"I couldn't do simple things like push a vacuum or do laundry. I felt like I lost my independence and sense of self. I had to put my career on hold indefinitely."





The impact from that motor vehicle crash in 2010 lingers for Dr. Eastman, who despite therapy and rehabilitation, still deals with headaches, fatigue, and forgetfulness. She finds it difficult to stand for more than a half-hour at a time.

But she's grown to accept her life and is grateful for the progress she has made. Dr. Eastman found that sharing information and stories about her TBI on her website (<http://drnicolemeastman.com>) was critical to recovery.

"What I found to be most therapeutic is writing about my struggles and offering support and encouragement to others, to instill hope and a sense of faith. I strive to help others realize that they are not alone," Dr. Eastman said. "Social media are good outlets for so many people with brain injuries who are often socially isolated."

Dr. Eastman is just one of the many TBI survivors who have shared their real stories of TBI as part of CDC's *Heads Up* TBI Film Festival: www.youtube.com/user/CDCFoundationTBI.

CDC salutes Dr. Eastman and other TBI survivors for their drive and determination, and encourages you to share these stories to help give a voice to brain injury—so it is no longer a "Silent Epidemic."

Share your story and learn more about TBI at:
www.facebook.com/CDCHeadsUp.

