

Recovering from a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

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The information in this leaflet is for patients who have had a traumatic brain injury following a head injury, and their friends and family.

What is a traumatic brain injury?

A traumatic brain injury (TBI) is an injury to the brain caused by an external force strong enough to move the brain within the skull, such as a fall, or road accident.

Immediately after a brain injury, the person may experience a loss of consciousness. There may be bruising or bleeding and specific parts of the brain may be affected. Some may experience a period of confusion and an inability to form new memories. We call this post traumatic amnesia (PTA). It is common to not remember a period of the hospital stay, although some people find this distressing. Many people recover well from a brain injury, and after a period of rest. Some may experience some changes in cognition, emotion or behaviour.

Cognitive Difficulties after a TBI

What is Cognition?

Cognition is a term used to describe our thinking, language and memory skills. This is our ability to remember things, use and understand language, concentrate on information and make decisions. During your time in hospital and after, you may experience some of the following difficulties:

- **Speed of thinking:** You may find your thinking feels slower after your injury.
- **Attention and concentration:** You may find it harder to focus on tasks and become easily distracted by noise or movement.
- **Memory:** You may find it harder to remember new information such as recent conversations
- **Executive functioning:** It may be harder to plan, organise, reason or make decisions. As well as sequence tasks in the correct order or identifying solutions to problems.
- **Impaired insight:** You may have difficulty understanding your brain injury and the impact it has had on you. It may be other people that notice the change.
- **Visual-perceptual changes:** You may notice changes in processing shapes or objects even if you have not seen any changes to your vision and eyesight.
- **Language changes:** You may experience difficulties understanding what is being said, or problems finding and/or using the correct words. You may also find that you talk slower or need additional time to articulate words. You may also find yourself talking over other people or talking before someone has finished their sentence.

Other causes of cognitive difficulties

There are several other things that can contribute to cognitive or memory problems after a TBI. These may include:

- Fatigue
- Pain
- Low mood
- Anxiety
- Effects of Medication
- Ongoing physical health problems

Emotional and behavioural changes after a TBI

Emotional

You may experience a range of different emotions, some of these might include:

- **Irritability:** Getting angry or frustrated more quickly or feeling agitated.
- **Anxiety:** Worry about the future, or of getting ill again.
- **Depression:** Feeling low in mood, tearful, hopeless or experiencing a sense of loss.
- **Emotional lability:** Mood swings where you laugh or cry more easily.
- **Identity changes:** Feeling that you are a different person to the one you were before.

Behavioural changes

It is common to experience changes in personality or behaviour. Symptoms could include the following:

- **Impulsivity:** Acting without thinking about the consequences.
- **Disinhibition:** Not having a filter, or saying or doing things that others may regard as inappropriate.
- **Inflexibility:** Being more fixed or rigid in your thinking and finding it difficult to see another person's point of view.

When to seek further support

During your time in hospital, you should be seen by a range of healthcare professionals who are able to monitor your cognition, behaviour and emotions. It is their role to support you in accessing the correct services upon discharge such as a referral to your local community neurorehabilitation team.

For emotional support, you can self-refer to your local wellbeing service. In Norfolk and Waveney, this would be the Norfolk and Waveney Talking Therapies Wellbeing Service who work in partnership with a number of organisations including Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust and Norfolk and Waveney MIND.

Tel: 0300 123 1503

Lines open Monday to Friday (excluding Bank Holidays) from 8am – 8pm

Email: admin@wellbeingnandw.co.uk

Website: www.wellbeingnands.co.uk

How to help yourself

After a brain injury, it is important that you have a period of rest for a few weeks in order for your brain to recover. Tasks that involve thinking (e.g. making decisions, planning, writing emails and socialising) can cause as much or more fatigue than physical tasks. Please take advice from your doctor with respect to how quickly to return to normal activities such as work and childcare.

This period of rest should be followed by a gradual return to normal activities. Returning gradually is crucial as you test how easy things are for you to do. This will also allow the brain time to heal as you begin to resume day to day tasks. The following strategies will help guide you as you recover.

Self-help strategies

- **Establish a routine and be organised** – Find a single place to put your keys, phone and diary.
- **Memory** – Make a ‘to do’ list and use your mobile phone to support your memory by using the calendar and notes section. Set alarms as reminders.
- **Attention** – Reduce distractions and focus on one thing at a time.
- **Executive function** – Stop and think before acting, break down tasks into smaller steps, and write down the pros and cons of options when making decisions. Seek feedback from other people regarding your behaviour, and advice from a neuropsychologist as necessary.
- **Managing fatigue** – Avoid overexertion, rest when needed and alternate between more demanding thinking tasks and lower energy activities.
- **Sleep** – Aim for a regular sleep routine and avoid caffeine and screens before bed.
- **Relaxation** – Engage in activities that will promote calm.
- **Stay connected** – Maintain social connections with friends and family.
- **Engage in pleasurable activities** – Do things you find enjoyable regularly.
- **Coping strategies** – Use coping strategies that have worked well in the past and avoid unhelpful strategies (caffeine, alcohol, drug use).
- **Self-care**
 - Stay active and take regular exercise with guidance from a doctor.
 - Eat and drink healthily with small and regular meals/ snacks.
 - Get as much sunlight, nature and fresh air as possible.

Your Feedback

We want your visit to be as comfortable as possible - talk to the person in charge if you have any concerns. If the ward/department staff are unable to resolve it, then ask for our Patient Advice and Liaison (PALS) information. Please be assured that raising a concern will not impact on your care.

Before leaving please complete a Friends and Family Test feedback card.

Help us transform NHS services and to support patient choice.

OUR VALUES

Collaboration

We work positively with others to achieve shared aims

Accountability

We act with professionalism and integrity, delivering what we commit to, embedding learning when things do not go to plan

Respect

We are anti-discriminatory, treating people fairly and creating a sense of belonging and pride

Empowerment

We speak out when things don't feel right, we are innovative and make changes to support continuous improvement

Support

We are compassionate, listen attentively and are kind to ourselves and each other



The hospital can arrange for an interpreter or person to sign to assist you in communicating effectively with staff during your stay. Please let us know.

For a large print version of this leaflet, contact PALS 01493 453240