

TIPS AND TRICKS

for adults after brain injury

Tips and tricks

Have you been told that you may have suffered a brain injury? Living with a brain injury is also known as living with a 'hidden disability' because you can't see it. It is understandable if you are feeling scared, confused and frustrated. You have probably been thrown into a world you know little about but are expected to quickly understand and cope with. This leaflet aims to answer some of your questions and leave you feeling less fearful.

Here you can find information about:

Health Remembering
Getting organised **Getting help**

Dealing with emotions

Focusing **Reading other people**

Relationships Alcohol and drugs

Money What a brain injury doesn't mean

What a brain injury doesn't mean

- Just because you look fine, doesn't mean you are fine. Brain injury is a 'hidden disability' because no one can see it. This does not mean that the problems you are experiencing are not real
- Having a "mild" brain injury does not necessarily mean that you have "mild" problems. A "mild" brain injury can still mean that it is difficult to manage your problems. A person who has had more than one "mild" brain injury can have similar problems to those who have had a single "severe" brain injury
- Having a brain injury does not mean that you are stupid. People with a brain injury can still be very intelligent, but you may get confused sometimes
- Having a brain injury does not mean that you are lazy, but a brain injury may make you feel tired easily. It can make it harder for you to get started than before
- You may not remember having had a brain injury. It is normal for someone to forget what has happened straight after their brain injury

Dealing with emotions

You may have noticed changes in the way you act, or other people may have told you that you have changed. People with a brain injury may have difficulty managing their emotions.

- Anger. Things that used to be simple are now difficult. Sometimes it can be hard to manage your anger but remember that you are going through a big change. Give yourself time
- You may cry easily or feel sad a lot. On days like these, you may not have any energy or drive to do anything
- Mood swings. Do people say you sometimes go from being calm and happy to suddenly angry or sad?

Maybe you feel none of these changes, all of these changes or have some good and some bad days.

What you can do

- Chill out. Breathe deeply and slowly if you start to feel angry and stressed. Controlling your breathing will help your body to calm down and help you to feel less angry
- Do other things to help you relax like listening to music, reading or watching TV
- Exercising can make you feel better. Try doing a workout in your room, for example press-ups, squats, tricep dips, sit-ups. Set yourself a goal and try to beat it!
- Everyone finds it hard to talk to people about their feelings but this can be really helpful. As well as your friends, you could talk to one of your key workers
- Keep a diary to see what makes you angry
- It might be hard, but try not to compare yourself with your friends or other people around you

Remembering

Does this sound a bit like you?

“I don’t always know what day it is”

“I can’t remember people’s names”

Do people complain because you always forget to do things?

- Forgetting things after a brain injury is normal but it is likely to make you feel annoyed, frustrated, angry or scared
- Having memory problems can be tiring as you need to make an effort to remember. Your memory can also get worse when you are tired
- It is normal to remember the past, but remembering new things may be harder

What you can do

- It could be helpful to write down what you need to remember in a calendar, book or diary. You could try writing all your appointments on a timetable and sticking it on your wall
- When you are given information to remember you could try saying it over and over, writing it down quickly or linking it to images. For example, if you meet someone called Ben, who is tall, you could think of ‘Big Ben’
- If you can’t remember something try your best not to panic. Relax and give it a moment. Often, if you stop trying to remember it, it will come to you
- Sometimes we can remember things better when we are relaxed, so do things that you enjoy, like listening to music
- To avoid losing things, always put them in the same place

Getting organised

Do you find you are not prepared for something when you should be? Do people get angry with you because you can't think about what you are going to do this afternoon, let alone tomorrow?

Trying to think about what you are going to do can be really difficult for some people.

- Do you find it difficult to plan what you want to do?
- Do you then find it hard to stick to your plan?

Don't worry. There are plenty of things you can do to help.

What you can do

- Routines are helpful. They help you remember what you need to do each day. Don't be afraid to write down a plan or ask someone to help you. Once you get into the routine, you might not need the plan anymore
- Don't rush yourself. Give yourself time to write down a plan of what you need to do
- Ask other people to help you plan something. You could say "I'm preparing for...can you think of anything else I should do?"
- Have step-by-step lists to help you with things you find difficult. For example, what you need to do to pay a bill or cook a meal
- Tick off each thing on your list or plan when you have completed it. This way you won't leave anything out

Focusing

Have people told you that you don't listen to them properly?

- Do you have difficulty focusing on more than one thing at a time? Maybe you have to stop what you are doing if someone starts talking to you
- Do you get distracted easily? For example, finding it hard to focus on one thing for a long time, such as watching a whole TV show, or you start looking out the window when someone is talking to you

What you can do

- Sleep is important, as it can be harder to focus when you are tired. Try to do difficult things when you feel most awake. If you have an important meeting, lesson or exam, try to get lots of sleep beforehand
- Break large activities down into small, easy tasks. If you have a lot of things to do, complete them one at a time rather than trying to do everything in one go
- Explain to other people that you may need to take lots of breaks and not rush. This might mean that it takes you a bit longer to get something done but that's okay. You could say "I find it hard to concentrate. Can I do ten minutes work and then take a break?"



Reading people

**Do others say you are rude when you are speaking to them?
This may be because you find it difficult to keep up with a
conversation or say the right thing.**

- Do you get annoyed because you can't find the right words for what you want to say, or have trouble putting words in the right order?
- You might get confused about when it is your turn to talk in a conversation or interrupt people without meaning to
- Do people tell you that you misinterpret their words or actions?
- Maybe you don't think before you say things, which might mean that you swear more or say the wrong things.
- Do people fall out with you when you don't think you've done anything wrong?

What you can do

- You could ask people you trust to gently point out when your behaviour offends them. This will make you more aware of what you are doing, as you might not realise
- Listen carefully to other people. Make sure you understand what they are saying before you respond
- Do not be embarrassed to ask people to say things again if you didn't understand. It can be useful to write things down to help you remember
- Look at people's faces and body language when they are speaking. Think about what that means before you respond
- Try your best to keep calm and not get angry



Relationships

Do you find it difficult to hang out with and meet new people?

The problems that we have been talking about can make it harder to be in a relationship with someone. If you have been having these problems, friends, family, your girlfriend or boyfriend may not understand why you are acting in a certain way. It isn't surprising if you are left feeling lonely.

- Have you been finding it difficult to tell people how you feel and show others that you still care for them?
- Have you been feeling like you can't be bothered to go out with friends or family? Maybe you find it hard to be around lots of people
- Have you been having problems with sex? This could be because you don't feel good about yourself, your relationship with your girlfriend or boyfriend has changed, your sex drive is not the same as before, you may have injured the part of your brain that is involved in sex, or you may have physical problems. Side effects of medication may also be a cause of these problems

What you can do

- Keep in touch with others and talk to your friends and family
- Talking to other people can be really helpful. Don't be embarrassed to admit that you are feeling scared, angry or that you feel like you are struggling
- Don't be afraid to discuss any problems you may have in your sex life with your GP. They may be able to help you



Alcohol and drugs

Alcohol and street drugs have serious effects. This can be hard to accept when you just want to go out and forget about your problems. Did you know that drinking alcohol is even more dangerous for someone with a brain injury?

It is like having had two pints of beer or cider when you actually only drank one.

Here are some ways that alcohol can affect you:

- It can make your problems worse. For example, alcohol can make your memory worse
- Although drinking alcohol might make you happy for a little while, it can make you feel very low later and even lower if you carry on drinking
- Seizures (fits) - If you drink alcohol or take street drugs after hitting your head you are more likely to have a seizure even if you have not had one before

What you can do

The best advice is not to drink alcohol at all but we know this isn't easy.

- Some people do say that giving up alcohol completely is actually easier than trying to cut down on how much you drink
- Street drugs are illegal so it is important that you don't take them
- Seek support through your local alcohol or drug agency or speak with your GP about how they can support you

Money

Managing money can be difficult for many people. Here are a few money problems you might be having:

- Not being able to plan ahead, like saving up for a bill
- Buying things you don't need without thinking properly
- Spending all your money in one go without saving any
- Getting into debt

What you can do

Write a list so you know exactly what you need to buy.

- Use reminders (on a calendar or diary) to help you remember important things like when you have to pay a bill
- Write down when you have bought something so you can keep track of your spending. Ask a friend to help you or go shopping together
- Think about what you actually need and buy that first
- Lending money to friends might feel like a nice thing to do but always check you have enough and make sure you ask when they will pay you back

Health

Have you noticed some changes in your fitness? Or have your friends or family noticed something?

- Do you get headaches or feel dizzy?
- Do you get tired really easily?
- Do you have problems moving your body or find it hard to balance?

What you can do

- Sleep is really important if you get headaches or feel tired easily. Make sure you tell other people about these problems too
- Getting into a good routine like going to sleep and waking up around the same time each day can be helpful
- Make an appointment to see your GP, as they may be able to offer you some advice
- Keep active and participate in activities you enjoy

Getting help

If you need further help or advice:

www.thedtgroup.org/foundation

The Disabilities Trust Foundation

www.birt.co.uk

The Brain Injury Rehabilitation Trust

www.nhs.uk

Learn about the symptoms of brain injury on the NHS website.
For more help ring NHS 111

www.dwp.gov.uk

The Department of Work and Pensions can offer help on jobs and money

www.headway.org.uk

Headway

What you can do

- Chill out. Having a brain injury can make you feel stressed, angry, down and confused. Give yourself time to relax. We all need a bit of 'me' time
- Talk to others. We all find this hard but it is really helpful when you talk to others about your worries, for advice or just to feel less lonely
- Plan and routine. Setting alarms to remind you to do things will help you remember what you need to do. Getting into a routine can also help you remember what you need to do every day
- Exercise. Getting out and about can make you feel better about yourself





The Disabilities Trust Foundation

The Disabilities Trust is a leading national charity, providing innovative services, rehabilitation and support solutions for people with profound physical impairments, acquired brain injury and learning disabilities as well as children and adults with autism. The Foundation is the division within the Trust that aims to make a difference to the lives of those who are unable to access our core services. The Foundation enables the Trust to share its expertise and knowledge through research and the piloting of new ideas. Our project work is designed to initiate and enhance good practice and direct or influence policy within our areas of expertise - brain injury, learning disabilities, autism and physical disabilities.

Founded in 1979, The Disabilities Trust is a company limited by guarantee incorporated in England and Wales under 2334589 and registered as a charity in England and Wales under 800797 (BIRT: 800797-1) and in Scotland under SC038972 (BIRT: SC043579). Registered office as shown.

Contact us

The Disabilities Trust Foundation
32 Market Place, Burgess Hill,
West Sussex, RH15 9NP, UK

foundation@thedtgroup.org
01444 239 123