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## Traumatic Brain Injury Guide for Family and Friends

### For Family and Friends:

Your life has changed too. It is sometimes difficult to understand what a person with a traumatic brain injury is going through. They look completely normal, but yet they do things differently or not as well as they used to. It's not like a broken leg where you can see the problem. This is a brain injury, and brain injury is typically not visible from the outside.

### What to look for:

- Fatigue
- Forgetfulness
- Frustration
- Anxiety / overwhelmed
- Changes in ability to deal with things
- Problems with speech and thinking.

### How to help:

- Understand that your friend or family member is learning to live in a new way and doesn't want to live the new way. They want it "like it was" prior to the injury.
- Give them time to understand what you are saying, it may take longer than normal for them to respond, and it may seem as if they are not listening.
  - Repeat when requested without frustration. Their listening can be like a bad phone connection. You may have to repeat several times.
  - When they have it, it sometimes just takes time to process and to formulate the correct answer. Listening, thinking and talking are all harder now.
- Crowds / big box stores are often difficult for people with brain injuries, keep gatherings small in a calm environment.
  - Avoid places with bright lights and loud noises.
- Encourage your friend or family member to rest or nap.
  - For a person with a brain injury over doing it can mean it takes them a long time to fully recover. When they over do things, it can lead to days in bed.

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## Traumatic Brain Injury Guide for Patients

### For patients who have had a brain injury:

Many patients who have suffered a brain injury have similar symptoms. The list below highlights the most common symptoms we hear in our office.

- Inability to multi-task
- Increase in anxiety
  - Especially:
    - In large crowds
    - The grocery store
    - As a passenger in a car – the driver always breaks too late!
    - With loud noises or crowds.
- Easily fatigued
- Trouble reading for long periods of time
- Reading comprehension
- Sensitivity to loud noises
- Balance / walking problems

Here is a list of things you can do to help alleviate the symptoms you are experiencing:

- Alternate between thinking and doing tasks, both at work and at home. Switch every hour.
  - Thinking Task: Reading over a contract, texting, meeting with other people (Church, friends, family, etc.).
  - Doing Task: Stuffing envelopes, washing dishes, listening to music, walking the dog.
- Use weighted blankets, weighted vests, tight fitting Under Armor compression t-shirts, and leggings.
  - All of the above can help decrease anxiety.
  - Weighted vests, compression shirts and leggings can help with balance and walking as well.
- Get lots of sleep – 8 hours a night at least.
  - After a brain injury sleep becomes even more important, so 9 or 10 hours a night is even better.
  - Avoid Caffeine! Caffeine's half-life is 6 hours. So, the 150mg of caffeine in your coffee is still 75mg of caffeine 6 hours later, and 38 mg 12 hours after you drank the coffee/soda. Stop caffeine at noon or avoid all together.
  - Take naps instead.
  - If you have a CPAP machine it is critical that you use it! Your brain can't heal with low oxygen!
- Ear plugs - keep them with you. Noise cancelling headphones are a great gift!
- Change your schedule.
  - If possible, work 2 days and then take one day off, it may mean you don't have traditional weekends, but working shorter periods with more frequent rest days will make your work and rest days more enjoyable and more productive. Consider a split workday. 2 to 4 hours on, 2 hours for rest, then 2 to 4 hours work. (See alternating thinking and doing!)
  - If you are attending an event with lots of people, set a timer or have your spouse get you out of that situation after a short exposure. If you do too much you will be wiped out the next day or two and may even spend the whole day in bed!
- Make a list / plan for everything.
  - A day plan but keep it flexible depending on if it is a good day or not.
  - Use a group Google calendar on the computer / phone to keep everyone synchronized.
  - Write down things you want to do.
  - Make a list of questions to ask so you forget.
  - Make a list of things you want to do in a specific task. (1. Get bread, mayo, lettuce, tomato and bacon out of refrigerator. 2. Cook Bacon. 3. Cut tomato and lettuce. 4. Toast bread. 5. Assemble and enjoy!)

Recommended reading: "The Ghost in my Brain" by Clark Elliot