

Brain Injury: What is & What Now?

- An acquired brain injury (ABI) occurs after birth when the brain is injured, often resulting in changes in how a person thinks, acts, and feels.

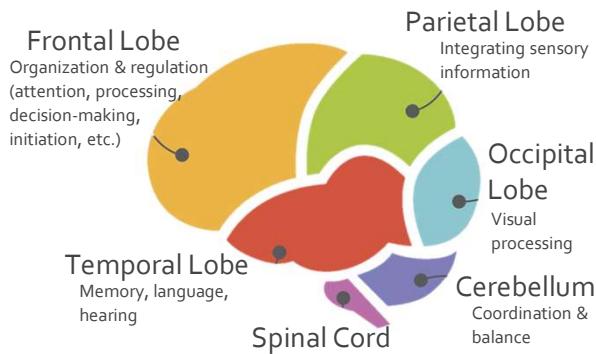
Non-traumatic Brain Injury

- Caused by internal forces
- Common causes can include stroke, substance overdose, lack of oxygen, or tumors.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

- Result of external forces, a bump, jolt, or blow to the head directly or indirectly
- Can lead to potentially chronic challenges affecting not only the person, but the family, community, and services.
- Common causes are falls, motor vehicle collisions, assaults, or blasts.

- Different parts of the brain are responsible for different functions a person can perform, such as a person's movements, emotions, processing of the sounds/sights around, starting or holding a conversation, or being able to pay attention or remember information.



- When the brain is injured, tasks may be more challenging than prior to injury. Repetitive training and strategies to compensate for change in function can form new pathways within the brain and facilitate rehabilitation.
- Despite the make-up or changes in a person's brain, people living with brain injury are people first – not a diagnosis or someone to be counted out.

Common Changes after Injury

Physical/Sensory

(HOW YOUR MUSCLES OR BODILY HEALTH IS AFFECTED):



- Seizures/History of
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Sleep disturbance
- Weakness/paralysis
- Movement & coordination
- Sexual function
- Balance
- Sensory changes (sight, smell, touch, hearing, taste)

Thinking

(HOW YOU PROCESS AND ENGAGE WITH YOUR ENVIRONMENT):



- Memory/recall & mental flexibility
- Attention/ concentration & learning
- Planning & organization
- Initiation & motivation
- Task-switching and sequencing
- Fatigue
- Safety awareness and impulsivity
- Problem solving, decision-making, judgement, and reasoning
- Social skills, processing, & speech

Feelings & Behavior

(HOW YOU FEEL AND ACTIONS THAT MAY BE DIFFERENT FROM BEFORE):



- Difficulty with regulation (emotions, actions, etc.)
- Self-awareness
- Personality
- Irritability
- Unrelated laughter or crying
- Lethargy
- Restlessness
- Psychological conditions (depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, etc.)

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One of the more challenging aspects of brain injury can be the invisible nature of it. Some changes are not seen on the outside but can be very real on the inside like someone's thoughts, fatigue, or feelings. Stigma, or the negative and often unfair beliefs that a society or group of people have about something, can occur without proper awareness and understanding about brain injury. Whether you are a survivor, family member, ally, professional, or learning about brain injury for the first time, there are certain strategies and tips for living well after injury and thriving within one's community. **Wellness** is an active process of becoming aware of and making choices toward a healthy and fulfilling life. It can be more than being free from illness, it is a dynamic process of change and growth. Growth after brain injury can be a long process but possible when filled with patience, flexibility, and victories big and small.

Strategies for Success

- Frequent breaks and planning ahead
- Structure and importance of consistency/scheduling
- Minimizing distractions
- Learn in small steps with increasing distractions
- Use of planners, notebooks, apps, calendars, communication books, etc.
- Break tasks or instructions into smaller, realistic goals
- Repetition, rephrasing, and patience
- Identifying and helping with multiple methods of learning (visual, verbal, written)
- On-the-spot, specific feedback
- Use of positive reinforcement & incentives
- Plans for alternative behavior success

Living Well After Injury

Every person is different, some ideas to consider:

1. Structure & keeping routines
2. Connecting with resources in your community
3. Educating yourself and others on brain injury
4. Taking care of yourself with nutrition, exercise, and self-care
5. Practicing creativity and flexibility in rehabilitation
6. Linking with others through support groups or daily activities
7. Adaptive tools/technology or accommodations (a modification or adjustment to enable equal opportunity) can be helpful for independence



Resources

- Brainline: www.brainline.org/
- Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center: www.msktc.org/tbi/model-system-centers
- AARP: www.aarp.org/caregiving/
- Brain Injury Association of America: www.biausa.org/brain-injury/about-brain-injury
- Defense & Veterans Brain Injury Center (DVBIC): dvbic.dcoe.mil/
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury/index.html
- Online Training:
 - www.tbistafftraining.info/
 - ohiovalley.org/informationeducation/tbi101
 - www.biancteach.net
 - www.neurorestorative.com/knowledge-center/neuro-institute/