

Common symptoms after a Traumatic Brain Injury

After a Traumatic Brain Injury, people can experience a variety of symptoms, which vary depending on the severity of the brain injury, and the part of the brain that's been injured. In the guide, we explore some of the common symptoms your family member may experience, as well as some important tips on managing them.



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Common symptoms after a Traumatic Brain Injury

After a Traumatic Brain Injury, people can experience a variety of symptoms and effects. These will vary depending on the severity of the brain injury, and the part of the brain that's been injured. Treatment and rehabilitation can be introduced to help your family member to manage these symptoms. Below are some of the more common symptoms your family member may experience, as well as some important tips on managing them:



Fatigue



Sleep problems



Memory



Concentration



Visual problems



Anger and irritability



Low mood, depression and anxiety



Personality changes



Mobility challenges



Language and speech



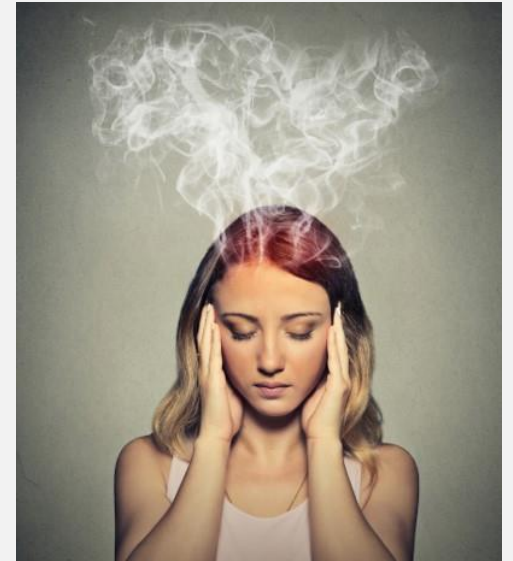
Insight and empathy



Fatigue

Fatigue is a common symptom for people who have suffered a brain injury. Unlike normal tiredness, which is relieved by rest, brain injuries can lead to an intense feeling of fatigue that is often present most of the time.

This can have a huge effect on the injured person in many ways, including mood and behaviour. It's common for a brain injured person to become frustrated and irritable about their limitations - particularly if they like to be active. Others may feel depressed about how their injury is stopping them doing what they want to do, which can lead to them being unsociable and shutting people out.



It's important to understand the significant impact that fatigue can have on your family member. Try to be supportive, explain to them that what they're feeling is common. If you have any concerns, discuss these with the medical team.

Even if your family member's recovery is very slow, give them positive reinforcement on any progress they make.



Sleep problems

After a brain injury, many people report problems with sleeping, despite experiencing fatigue. This can be particularly difficult at night time. Promoting sleep and rest is beneficial to help the brain to recover, as well as combat fatigue.

You should encourage your family member to get into a sleep routine. This will enable the brain to adjust to its own sleep pattern. You could try to get them to go to bed at the same time each night and wake up at the same time each morning. When they go to bed, try to keep noise levels down to allow them to rest well without disturbance.

Your family member may also need to rest during the day and take naps because of their fatigue.



Memory problems

Memory is a complex process, which involves several parts of the brain. Memory problems are very common after a Traumatic Brain Injury, as an injury to any of these parts can impair the process. As an example, people can experience problems with short-term memory or making new memories after a brain injury.

Struggling to remember things can be extremely frustrating for the injured person. They may become confused and unable to understand the passage of time. This confusion can result in them losing a sense of their identity and understanding of who they are.



It's important that you are patient with your family member when they are struggling with memory problems. It can be distressing to come to terms with this change, but there are some simple things on the next page that you can do to help with the situation.

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Memory problems

Keeping to a daily and weekly routine can help people with a brain injury get used to their memory problems and reduce the need to remember as many activities. It will also help your family member to feel safe. If there is a change to the routine, you should speak to them and explain carefully why there will be a change, and prepare them for this in advance. Writing down the routine on a whiteboard or noticeboard can be useful, so your family member can follow what is happening.

It is also a good idea to use notepads and labels to help them to remember important things or to help find where things are kept.

Concentration

You may notice a change in your family member's concentration and attention span after a brain injury. They may be unable to focus on things that would have been easy before their accident, or seem restless or distracted.

They may also have trouble following long conversations and be unable to undertake more than one task at a time. They may also fail to complete tasks they have started and appear to lose interest. These are common issues faced by people after a brain injury.

Try to encourage them to undertake tasks one at a time without any distractions. You should try to keep noise to a minimum when your family member is concentrating and provide a quiet space for them.

Practising concentration can also help with their recovery. Start with simple activities such as reading a paragraph of text, or adding small numbers and build up to more difficult tasks such as reading a short story.

Fatigue can have a huge impact on concentration, so if you can see they are getting tired, let them rest and return to the activity once their energy levels have increased. For further guidance, you should ask to speak to your family member's Occupational Therapist.



Language and speech difficulties

Brain injuries can sometimes cause problems with communication. This can include the ability to speak and understand language.

Difficulties with speech can be caused by physical damage to the part of the brain that controls the muscles used for speech, as well as damage to the part of the brain that processes and understands language.

A Speech and Language Therapist will provide help and advice specific to the problems faced by your family member. They might suggest different treatments, including therapies to encourage speech, as well as other strategies that can help you and your family in your everyday lives.

The Speech and Language Therapist may also undertake a swallow assessment if your family member is having problems with eating or drinking and provide advice where necessary.

Due to the complex nature of these problems, specific advice will be given to your family member about any difficulties they are facing. Specialist treatment and techniques will be provided to help with any ongoing problems.



Impaired insight and empathy

You may notice a change in your family member's ability to understand their own and other people's behaviour after a brain injury. A lack of self-awareness and insight into situations and other people's views and feelings is a common symptom many people struggle with.

This can be difficult for friends and family to understand. You may struggle to come to terms with this change and become embarrassed or annoyed about their behaviour. Unfortunately, your family member may become angry and frustrated with you when you try to help them with certain things or address any inappropriate behaviour.

Try to avoid any arguments or confrontation with them about their behaviour. Talk to them in a calm and gentle manner but be clear and direct about what behaviour was inappropriate. If they become angry, change the conversation and try to return to the problem once they are calmer. Provide feedback to them in a non-critical manner and explain any problems and consequences of their behaviour, using examples where possible.

If you require further support, please seek guidance from the medical team or request to speak to a psychologist.





Visual problems

Visual problems usually occur after damage to the occipital lobe, which is located in the back of the head. There are a number of visual problems people experience after a brain injury, but some of the more common problems include:

- **Blurred vision** - when objects appear fuzzy and edges aren't clear.
- **Patchy vision** - where certain parts of the vision are lost, such as large sections or smaller patches across the field of vision.
- **Double vision** - seeing two images of one object at the same time.
- **Shaking vision** - caused by the eye moving side to side, up and down or round.

All of these symptoms can result in the injured person experiencing dizziness and nausea. If your family member is experiencing any problems with their vision, you should never let them drive.

An ophthalmologist will be able to assess your family member and diagnose any problems with their sight. They may recommend specialist glasses or contact lenses to combat some of these symptoms. Your family member may also benefit from adapted technology such as mobile phones and computers with larger screens and text.



Anger and irritability

Increased irritability can be a very noticeable change after a brain injury. Your family member may be more impatient and intolerant and become irritated by things that would not normally have bothered them.

Their increased irritability can also be linked to other symptoms they are experiencing, such as fatigue and problems with memory. You should try to remain calm with them and remember that any anger and irritability expressed towards you may be as a result of their injuries.



If you can see they are getting worked up, try to give them some space to calm down and collect their thoughts.

If you are concerned by their behaviour or need support, seek further guidance from their medical team.

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Personality changes

After a brain injury, it may feel as though your family member has changed, and they're not the same person as before. This can be upsetting for yourself and the injured person, as they will often experience a sense of losing their identity.

People sometimes compare the process of experiencing a brain injury to that of bereavement. People will often go through the same process of grieving for their family member and the way they were before the accident.



Take your time to process these changes to your family member's personality. It is common to be hard on yourself, but try to be kind to yourself and understand you need to make time for you too.

If you feel like you need support, speak to your GP or your family member's medical team, who will be able to help.



Mobility challenges

Depending on the nature of a brain injury, often people will make a good recovery from any mobility and physical problems they face initially.

This is why brain injuries are often referred to as an invisible injury, as there are very little external signs of the injury. However, some people will experience varying problems with balance and mobility, muscle contractions and weakness, loss of sensation or paralysis.

Your family member may move more slowly after a brain injury, or experience problems with balance requiring assessment. Using a wheelchair or mobility aids is often advised, although they may still be able to stand and walk short distances. Your family member will be supported and advised by their Physiotherapist and Occupational Therapist regarding the most appropriate mobility related equipment and options for them.

Your family member may also report stiffness, weakness, paralysis or experience spasms in their limbs (spasticity). This can sometimes affect one side of the body more than the other. If these symptoms cause discomfort, you should speak to your family member's doctor who may be able to prescribe medication to help with this.



Low mood, depression and anxiety

Feelings of depression, low mood and anxiety are common after a brain injury. Injured people can often have difficulty coming to terms with their injuries and the impact on their life. Some of these feelings may also be affected by frustration of other symptoms they are experiencing and being unable to function as they once had.

If you notice your family member has lost interest in hobbies they once would have enjoyed, have changed their eating or sleeping patterns, are isolating themselves or appear particularly low for a long period, this may be a sign they are experiencing feelings of low mood and signs of depression.



You should speak to their doctor about your concerns and encourage them to open up about how they are feeling. The doctor may be able to refer your family member to a neuropsychologist for an assessment and specialist treatment.



About CFG Law

As specialist serious injury solicitors, we have the expertise you would expect in recovering compensation when someone else is at fault. What sets us apart, however, is all the other things we do that you would not expect from a firm of solicitors and why we do it. What's more, our service is provided on a no win no fee basis, so there's no financial risk to you in making a claim.

Through specialist legal advice, together with financial, physical and emotional support, we help and provide support and guidance from day one. Our aim is to help your whole family, with an absolute focus on getting the best outcomes in terms of your recovery, wellbeing and independence.



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