

TBI TODAY

News, Ideas, and Resources from the Virginia TBI Model System

SURVIVOR TIP: CHALLENGES TO WORKING AFTER BRAIN INJURY AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

After TBI, many people have trouble going back to their old jobs or finding new jobs. Fatigue and slowness are two common problems that prevent people from successfully returning to work and carrying out responsibilities.

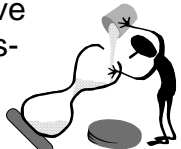
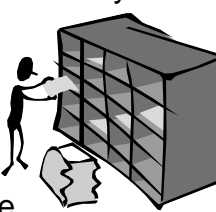
Sleep problems are common after brain injury. Some people have trouble getting to sleep. Others have trouble staying asleep. Lack of sleep is known to cause irritability and inefficiency. Tasks previously accomplished easily are now hard to do. You may find yourself feeling frustrated because you accomplish little during the day. Here are some tips for managing fatigue:

- ◆ Most people with brain injury try to take on too much and end up feeling frustrated. Recognize your limitations and plan accordingly. Take credit for doing the best you can.
- ◆ If you feel like you don't get much done, that's a sign you're planning too much each day. Set

smaller goals and realize that great accomplishments are often the result of many small successes.

- ◆ Talk to your boss about your schedule. It may be possible to work shorter days.
- ◆ Schedule regular breaks during the day. Breaks will give you a chance to recharge your batteries, so you can think more clearly.
- ◆ Schedule mentally challenging tasks, such as work and balancing the checkbook, during peak periods of energy.
- ◆ Promote sleep hygiene. Stick to a schedule – try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day. Avoid caffeine and exercise in the evening. If you can't fall asleep within 20 minutes of getting in bed, get up and do something quiet for a while before trying again.
- ◆ Talk to your doctor about medications for sleep and fatigue.

After injury, many survivors notice problems with mental and physical slowness. You may feel like you just can't think or do things as fast as you used to be able to. Often, family, friends, coworkers, and employers may not understand that slowness is a result of your injury. You may feel frustrated when you can't get as many things done in a day and other people don't understand. There are some things you can do to help. Read this list and try some of these ideas -

- ◆ Recognize that you are trying hard. Give yourself permission to take a little longer to get things done. 
- ◆ Organize your work environment for efficiency. Be sure that everything you need is close by, so you do not have to move to get what you need. 
- ◆ Be sure you give yourself enough time to do things. Avoid rushing yourself.

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- ◆ Plan small breaks between tasks, so you have time to get your energy back.

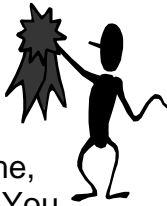


- ◆ Develop a list of tasks you need to accomplish, and then rank order the list in order of importance. Make sure you work on the most important tasks first.



- ◆ Make a schedule of when you'll complete each task and stick to it. Be sure your timelines are realistic, so you don't put too much pressure on yourself.

- ◆ Reward yourself when you finish each task – take a walk, call a friend, play a game, take a short nap. You deserve it!



Remember to be kind to yourself! You are trying your hardest to get better.

We recently did some research to find out where people with brain injuries are working. This list may give you some ideas about what kinds of jobs with which you are likely to be successful.

- ◆ Computer data entry



- ◆ Typing and word processing

- ◆ Food preparation

- ◆ Phone answering

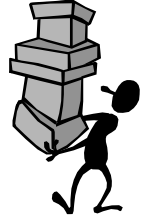


- ◆ Filing

- ◆ Collating & stapling documents

- ◆ Light cleaning

- ◆ Photocopying
- ◆ Pricing
- ◆ Packaging & unpacking materials
- ◆ Microfilming
- ◆ Mail preparation
- ◆ Light assembly
- ◆ Delivery



If you have other ideas about places people with brain injuries may be able to work successfully, send us your suggestions (ddwest@vcu.edu).



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