

TBI TODAY

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

THE VIRGINIA TBIMS TEAM

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Stress Management Fundamentals

By Jeffrey Kreutzer

For many survivors, brain injury brings on a period of long-term, intense stress. Injury brings on dramatic life changes, worries about recovery, work or school problems, and financial hardships. Many survivors worry that life will never be normal again. Understanding stress is a first step toward coping better with injury-related changes.

The word "stress" is used often and in many different ways. Psychologists define stress as: an emotional and physical response to a frightening or unpleasant situation. Stress is worse when you feel pressured to solve a problem quickly but don't see any solution. Feeling your muscles tighten and your heart beat faster or feeling like you have little control over your emotions are sure signs of stress.

Stress can make brain injury problems worse. Sometimes it can also cause additional problems, such as headaches or digestive problems. It can disrupt relationships due to irritability, a shorter temper, and impatience. Stress can be (contd. on page 6)

Adjustment and Resilience Brain Injury Study

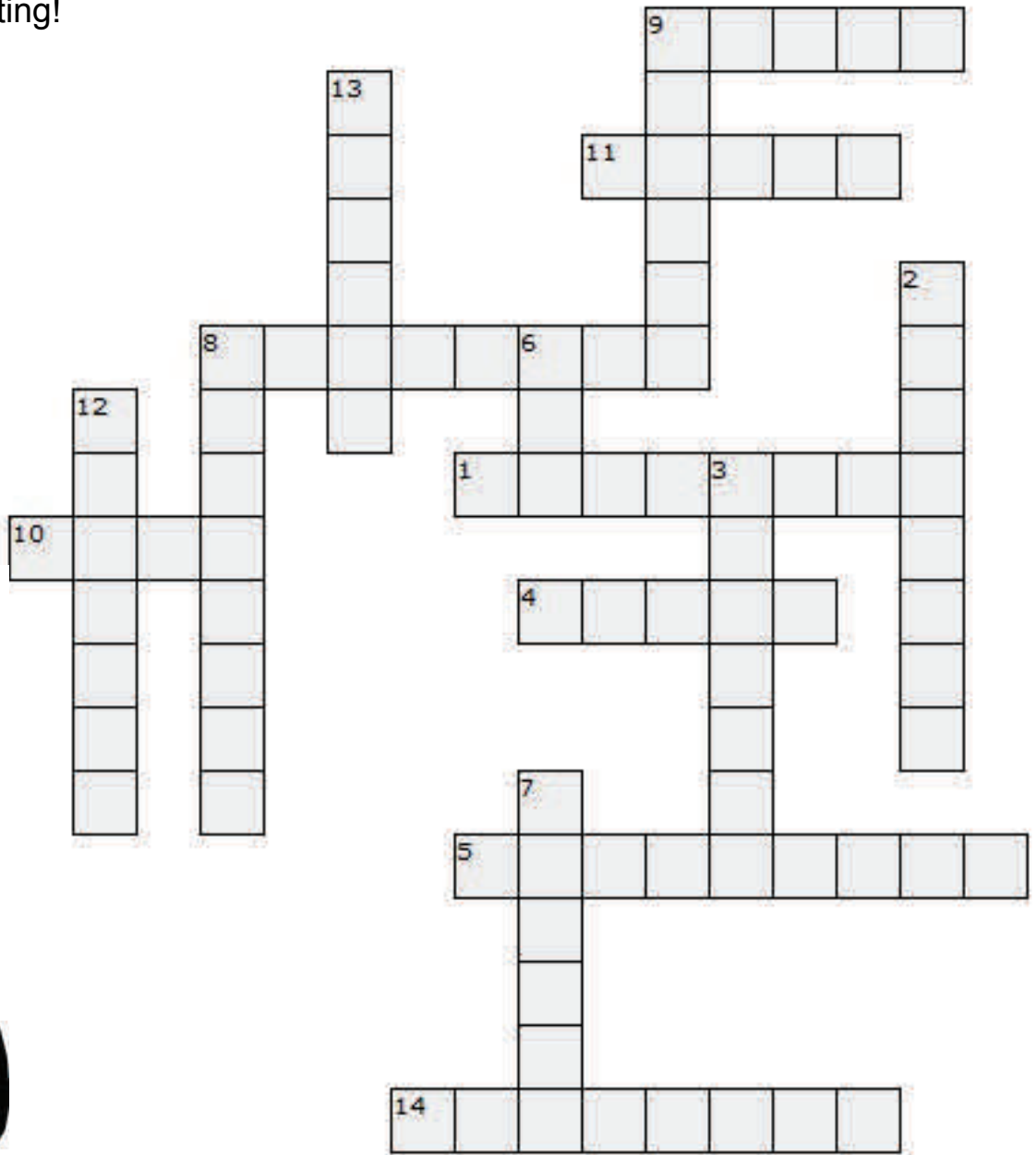
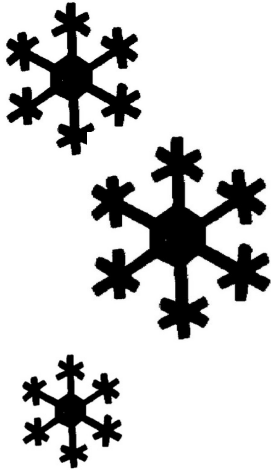
If you have had a TBI, you may qualify for a new research study! We are evaluating the helpfulness of an outpatient rehabilitation program to help people adjust to having a brain injury. Qualified volunteers will participate in seven education sessions. Study volunteers will be given information on brain injury, local resources, skills development, and positive coping strategies. Topics will include understanding changes that occur after brain injury, setting goals, problem solving, managing emotions and stress, and communicating well.

If you are interested in participating and 18 or older, please call Jenny Marwitz at 804-828-3704, or toll free at 1-866-296-6904, or by email at jhmarwit@vcu.edu.

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JUST FOR FUN!

See if you can figure out each word based on the clues below. All words have to do with our current season. If you get stumped, answers are on page 7. No cheating!



Across:

1. One of the month's of winter
4. Good for rain and snow
5. Winter holiday
8. Sliding down a hill, usually on a piece of plastic
9. Something you wrap around you to keep warm
10. Frozen precipitation that falls from the sky
11. Drink it to warm up, made from apples
14. When the sun is at it's lowest point; often happens on December 21

Down:

2. One of the month's of winter
3. Keeps your hands warm
6. Frozen water
7. Tool used to remove snow
8. Projectile that you can throw
9. Activity that you strap long boards to your feet
12. One of the month's of winter
13. Sport that takes place on ice

New Intervention for Couples After Brain Injury

Following the renewal of the TBI Model Systems grant at VCU, Drs. Kreutzer and Godwin have launched the Therapeutic Couples Intervention (TCI). The TCI is a continuation of our interest and commitment to family-focused research after brain injury.

Often, spouses or romantic partners take on a caregiving role when their partner suffers a brain injury. As such, the TCI is designed to assist couples after TBI.

Topics covered in the TCI program include:

- * What is normal for brain injury? Common problems after TBI
- * How are we different now? Common relationship changes after TBI
- * Communicating in a 'new' relationship
- * Managing stress effectively
- * Setting reasonable goals
- * Solving problems effectively
- * Establishing emotional intimacy
- * Renewing physical intimacy
- * Parenting 101: parenting education and skills (optional material for couples who are parents)
- * Parenting after TBI: Common hurdles to effective parenting (optional material for couples who are parents)
- * Taking care of yourself and your relationship
- * Focusing on gains and looking forward

Participation is free, and study volunteers will be compensated for their time. If you are interested in participating, please contact Jenny Marwitz at 804-828-3704, or toll free at 1-866-296-6904. Or, send an email to jhmarwit@vcu.edu.

Mark Your Calendar!



T.G.I.F.

- * **When:** March 1 and June 7 2013
- * **Location:** Varies, please call!
- * **Description:** the local departments of recreation & parks host this quarterly social event for survivors of brain injury, ages 18+
- * **Contact:** Call Lizz Billings at 804-501-7489 for more information and/or to be placed on the mailing list for monthly reminders.

Richmond Area Support Groups

- * **Location:** 2nd Monday every month at 6:30pm, Woodlake Methodist United Church, 15640 Hampton Park Drive in Chesterfield
- * **Contact:** Liz Perry-Varner at 804-276-5761
- * **Location:** 3rd Monday every month at 6 pm, Children's Hospital Auditorium, 2924 Brook Rd.
- * **Contact:** Call the Richmond BIAV at 804-355-5748 for more info!

May 2-3, 2013

- * **Event:** 37th Annual Williamsburg Brain Injury Rehabilitation Conference
- * **Location:** Williamsburg Hospitality House
- * **Contact:** Call 703-451-8881, ext 224 or visit www.tbiconferences.org. See our ad on page 7!

May 19-June 1, 2013

- * **Event:** Camp Bruce McCoy
- * **Location:** Triple-R Ranch in Chesapeake, VA
- * **Contact:** Call 1-800-444-6443 for more info!

If you have an upcoming event of interest to the Brain Injury community in Virginia, we would be glad to consider including it here. Please contact Matthew Wetsel at 804-828-3703 or wetselme@vcu.edu

Survivor Stories Wanted!

Recovering from a brain injury can be very difficult. Sometimes, one of the most helpful and inspiring things is simply hearing from other survivors who have gone through recovery and faced the same challenges. Are you a survivor with a story you'd like to share? If so, then we'd like to hear it, and it might get into a future issue of TBI Today!

Submit to: jhmarwit@vcu.edu

or

TBI Today, VCU P.O. Box 980542
Richmond, VA 23298-0542



DEAR PAT: I am a 43-year-old woman who had her life together until that fateful day last year when someone rear-ended me while I was sitting at the red light. I blacked out and didn't wake up until the ambulance was at the hospital. I was told that I had a concussion. I didn't understand what that meant since I felt fine other than a really bad headache. I went home later that night. I didn't know it was a life changing event.

My life has not been the same since that day. The kid who hit me has no idea what he did to me. I was working as a teacher, dating this wonderful man, and creating a wonderful network of friends in a new city. I felt like I was where I wanted to be, finally. Life was good.

Now, I can't say that my life is horrible. I have supportive family and friends who have stood by me and helped me through the tough times. I have overcome many hurdles, but still face many challenges. Before my injury, I could write my teaching lessons for the next day, listen to the radio, and carry on a conversation with my boyfriend. No way can I do that now. Everything is so much harder for me, even easy stuff takes me a long time to figure it out.

So, the reason I'm writing you is because I need help. I feel like I don't have control over my life! My house is such a disorganized mess that I can't find anything... I wasn't like this before. I don't know where to start picking up the pieces to put my life back together.

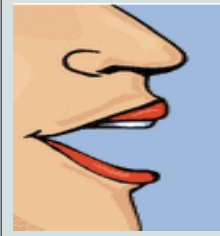
My short-term memory is definitely an issue. I don't remember my doctor's appointments, lunch dates with friends, where I put my keys, if I have taken my medications, conversations with my parents, the list goes on and on. I even forgot to turn the stove off once when I was cooking. There are sticky notes all over my house to help me remember. I also have my mom call me to make sure I have taken my medications.

I live alone now and I want it to stay that way. I think I can do it if someone can tell me what to do. I just need some guidance. I'm willing to work hard and do anything to get my life together. I would appreciate any advice you have. Thanks,
Holly

Dear Holly,

I commend you on your dedication to getting better after your injury. You sound like a motivated woman who is ready to take charge of your life. The changes you described are common changes after a traumatic brain injury or concussion. Dealing with those challenges is often frustrating. However, recognizing your strengths and weaknesses, as well as your limitations, is a positive step toward recovery. For example, one of the common complaints after TBI is the inability to multi-task. Knowing that you can no longer do more than one thing at a time, you should only focus on one project at a time and set aside more time to complete all the projects.

Becoming more organized and developing ways to compensate for your memory problems can



CHAT WITH PAT

Pat answers your personal questions about brain injury with compassion and practical advice. However, advice from Pat's column should not be substituted for consultation with a doctor or rehabilitation specialist. The identity of individuals submitting questions to "Chat with Pat" is kept strictly confidential.

help bring order to your life. I would recommend that you purchase a memory log book that contains a yearly calendar and notes section. You could also consider a professional organizer or a tablet; whichever you feel more comfortable using. Some people prefer paper and pencil format while others prefer electronic tools. In the log book, write down your appointment times, create to-do lists, track your medications, and events that happen throughout the day. Carry the log book/tablet with you everywhere and designate an area to keep the notebook. For example, it would be helpful to take your book/tablet with you to your doctor's appointment. You can write down notes from the visits to share with your family and schedule future appointments. You can also use it to write down questions you may have for your doctor during your next visit. Once you utilize the tool consistently, it will become part of your routine and you won't have to think about it. Hopefully, this will eliminate all the sticky notes around your house.
(contd. on page 5)

(Pat contd)

Developing routines is a good way to compensate for short-term memory problems. For example, sometimes people struggle with remembering to take medication. A good routine might involve taking them with your meals, when you are drinking your morning coffee, or when you are getting ready for bed. Routines turn into habits which will require less of your attention. Using a medication management aid (i.e. pillbox) will likely be beneficial if you're not already using it. The box has a small compartment for each day of the week. On Sundays, you fill up the box for the week to help track your

medications. Other suggestions include setting alarms as reminders, downloading a medication tracking app on your phone, or creating a color-coded chart.

Misplacing items can occur pretty frequently for individuals with a TBI, and even without! Creating designated areas for your valuable/important belongings can save time and energy. Place a hook or a bowl by the door for your keys. Always return the keys to their proper placement after you enter the house. Use the same strategy for your purse and cell phone. For example, place your keys, purse, and cell phone on a table by the front

door. Knowing where they belong will decrease time spent on looking for them.

It may be beneficial to work with a mental health counselor who specializes in working with individuals with TBI to help implement these kinds of strategies. You could contact your local chapter of Brain Injury Association for a referral. In the meantime, try these strategies to see if they work for you. You might have to modify them to fit your lifestyle and preference. I hope these tips will be a good start to organizing your life and putting the pieces back together. Good luck!

JUST THE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

THE INFORMATION PROVIDED IN THE FAQ IS INTENDED TO FAMILIARIZE THE PUBLIC WITH ISSUES RELATED TO TBI. NO INFORMATION PROVIDED HEREIN SHOULD BE CONSTRUED AS THERAPEUTIC ADVICE OR AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR CONSULTATION WITH A COMPETENT MEDICAL OR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL.

Q: After my TBI, I have trouble sleeping at night. What can I do?

A: Sleep problems are common following a brain injury. Here are some things you can try implementing:

- Set a regular sleep schedule: go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time every morning.
- Avoid watching television, eating, or reading in bed.
- If you still can't fall asleep after 15 - 20 minutes, do not stay in bed. Get up and do something until you feel drowsy. Return to bed only when you are ready to sleep so you associate bed with sleeping.
- Avoid taking naps during late afternoons.
- Avoid consuming caffeine and alcohol, particularly after late afternoon.
- Create a pre-sleep routine that relaxes your body and prepares it to go to sleep. For example, take a bath, listen to soft music, read, practice relaxation skills, etc.
- Try to exercise regularly, but avoid strenuous exercise 3 - 5 hours before bedtime.



Questions for Pat or the FAQ column are welcomed.

Send them to: "ASK PAT" OR "FAQ"

P.O. BOX 980542. RICHMOND, VA 23298-0542

or e-mail: jhmarwit@vcu.edu



(Stress, contd)

associated with worrying, depression, poor sleep, and low energy.

To help you understand how much stress you are facing, complete the *13 Item Stress Test* at the bottom of this page. You can use this test regularly as a way to take your temperature and see if your stress levels go up or down. After you complete and review your responses to the *13 Item Stress Test*, review and try out *Tips for Better Managing Stress* on the next page.

Realize that stress is a normal part of life. Know that, by trying, you can better manage stress. Learn to be patient with yourself. Understand that everyone, with or without a brain injury, struggles and feels stress at times.



13 Item Stress Test

TRUE	FALSE	I have a lot to do.
TRUE	FALSE	I have more to do than I can handle.
TRUE	FALSE	I'm not being productive.
TRUE	FALSE	I'm trying really hard but getting nothing done.
TRUE	FALSE	I am feeling unhealthy.
TRUE	FALSE	I can't afford to take breaks or time off.
TRUE	FALSE	I am pushing myself too hard.
TRUE	FALSE	I don't sleep very well.
TRUE	FALSE	Too many people are telling me what to do.
TRUE	FALSE	I am not treating people the way I want to be treated.
TRUE	FALSE	I feel totally exhausted.
TRUE	FALSE	Nobody is happy with what I do.
TRUE	FALSE	I can't stand living like this.

Scoring: The more **True's** you circled, the more stress you may feel. See the next page for tips on better stress management!

VCU, PM&R

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY MODEL SYSTEM

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Founded in 1983 by families and concerned professionals, the Brain Injury Association of Virginia is the only statewide non-profit organization in Virginia exclusively devoted to serving individuals with brain injury, their families, and those that care for and about them. Over 10,000 people find help from BIAV each year.

BIAV is a chartered state affiliate of the Brain Injury Association of America and exists to be the voice of brain injury through help, hope and healing for Virginians with brain injury and their families. We educate human service professionals and the community on the risks and impact of brain injury and advocate for improved medical and community-based services. Many of our staff members are Certified Brain Injury Specialists (CBIS Certified).

To find out more information about BIAV, contact us at 1-800-444-6443 or 804-355-5748. Or visit our website at www.biav.net.



The Voice of Brain Injury: Help, Hope & Healing