

Managing some common brain injury symptoms

Brain injury may affect all aspects of a person's life. While managing ongoing symptoms can be challenging, many people adapt and lead fulfilling lives. Supportive relationships, effective coping strategies, and engaging in meaningful activities can improve your loved one's well-being. It is important to focus on what enhances quality of life, not just the difficulties your loved one faces.

There are several strategies and treatments that may be used to help manage many of the common symptoms. As a quick refresher, in this guide we placed brain injury symptoms into four groups:

1. Thinking and learning
2. Physical health and communication
3. Emotion and mood
4. Behavior

Thinking and learning

Many people with brain injury experience challenges with thinking and learning. These symptoms may be due to the type or location of the brain injury. However, another reason a person may experience symptoms that affect thinking and learning is due to neuro fatigue or a "tired brain." After a brain injury, the brain may need more rest than before to recharge. You may even notice that your loved one is better able to pay attention earlier in the day and then become angrier or frustrated in the afternoon or evening. This is because their brain can't manage as much information as it could before.

Your loved one may also have trouble paying attention, making it harder for them to focus and process information. Too much stimulation in the environment, such as noise, bright lights, loud music, or large crowds of people, can cause a person with a brain injury to feel overloaded.

Tips for families

Help with organization and structure

- ✓ Create a routine or schedule—that includes rest breaks—to help provide structure for your loved one.
- ✓ Do more challenging thinking and learning activities in the morning or after a rest break.
- ✓ Have your loved one write down information.
- ✓ Hang a whiteboard calendar and use phone reminders to help keep them on task.
- ✓ Create designated quiet spaces for relaxation and to prevent overstimulation.
- ✓ Utilize memory aids like planners, notes, alarms, and smartphone apps to assist with daily tasks, appointment reminders, and medication management.

Use visual and verbal cues

- ✓ Create signs, labels, or memory books with pictures and short descriptions of people, places, and objects.
- ✓ Post safety plans for emergencies, such as a fire.
- ✓ Add labels to things like drawers and cabinets.

Manage types of activities

- ✓ Avoid or limit activities that include bright lights, loud noises, and crowded places.
- ✓ Plan short activities to prevent fatigue or frustration.
- ✓ Assist with starting an activity and provide reminders on steps to complete activities.
- ✓ Divide complex tasks into smaller, more manageable steps to reduce frustration and promote a sense of accomplishment.
- ✓ Give your loved one extra time to adjust if there is a change in their routine or to their regular daily activities.