

Emotional and Behavioural Changes After Brain Injury

Anxiety

QUICK FACTS

- It is common for individuals to experience anxiety after brain injury
- Stress can build over time and induce a state of anxiety
- Anxiety can also be a response to a specific situation or experience

WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE?

- Most common symptoms include: fear, worry, restlessness, difficulty concentrating and insomnia
- Sometimes people express anxiety by being irritable, tired, having muscle tension, being short of breath, or looking panicked
- May withdraw from social situations and find it difficult to engage in activities of daily life
- May become anxious about social situations and worry about how others will perceive them
- May become obsessional in thoughts and actions
- Signs of stress overload include:
 - Disorganization (e.g. forgetting and losing things, making a lot of simple mistakes)
 - Daydreaming
 - Trouble making even small decisions (e.g. deciding what to wear, what to have for lunch)
 - Depression, sadness

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE CAUSES AND COMPLICATIONS?

Possible causes:

- Injury to areas of the brain which support emotional regulation and fear responses
- Significant life changes
- Changes to the individual's cognitive skills and personality
- Prior personal or family history of anxiety
- Chronic stress (e.g. financial, work, family)
- Side-effects of prescription or nonprescription drugs
- Concerns about the future (i.e. health, employment, financial etc.)

Possible complications:

- May lead to low self-esteem and a poorer quality of life
- Anxiety may obstruct the individuals rehabilitation and interfere with relationships and communication

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Talk to your family doctor if symptoms persist for more than two weeks for medications
- Do not try to trivialize their anxiety, it is important to validate their feelings and concerns
- Help to remove associations of shame when the individual experiences anxiety
- Help identify triggers for anxiety and remove them to alleviate possible frustrations and aggravation
- Do not try to reason away the anxiety
- Access psychotherapy or counselling to develop strategies to cope with anxiety

Encourage the individual to:

- Practice relaxation techniques (e.g. mindfulness) and exercise regularly
- Participate in an recreational and leisure activities
- Have them focus on what is in their control
- To talk to family and friends about how they are feeling
- Focus on one thing at a time, and reduce the number of demands placed on them
- Build confidence by setting achievable tasks before giving more difficult ones

Disclaimer: This information is not meant to replace advice from a medical doctor. Consult a health care provider regarding specific medical concerns or treatment.