

FACT SHEET



Emotional and Behavioural Changes After Brain Injury Irritability & Frustration

QUICK FACTS

- One of the most common changes following brain injury is an increase in irritability
- Irritability refers to a feeling of agitation
- It is a feeling that something is not right and not knowing how to stay calm
- Frustration is an emotion that occurs in situations where a person is blocked from reaching a desired outcome

WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE?

- Impatience when completing a task or reaching a desired outcome
- Inability to tolerate other's mistakes
- Irritated by interruptions that may disrupt their attention (i.e. noise of children, kitchen sounds)
- Short-tempered when things do not work out right or when there is a difference of opinion
- Physical or verbal outbursts when they are unable to do a task that they set out to complete

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE CAUSES AND COMPLICATIONS?

Possible causes:

- Emotional dysregulation due to damage of the frontal lobes
- Sleep problems and headaches
- Anxiety or depression
- Reduced behavioural control
- Over stimulating environment (excessive noise, light, visual stimuli, etc.)
- Individual may have been an irritable person before injury and these tendencies are increased/amplified with injury
- Inability to find the words they want to use or recall certain information

Possible complications:

- Irritability and frustration may lead to anger and angry outbursts of verbal or physical aggression
- Disengagement in activities and hobbies that they once enjoyed
- May lead to loss of friendships, withdrawal and isolation

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Identify triggers to frustration and avoid situations that may be triggering
- Establish a routine that provides structure and predictability for the individual
- Discuss possible ways to manage frustrating situations
- Reduce unwanted noise or stimulation in their environment
- Normalize irritability and highlight the importance of managing it
- Encourage the individual to develop self-calming strategies, relaxation techniques, communication methods and to think positive thoughts
- Know when it is time to take a break
- Develop a signal to "stop", cue to relax, and take deep breaths

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