

FACT SHEET



Emotional and Behavioural Changes After Brain Injury Mood Swings and Emotional Liability

QUICK FACTS

- Emotional reaction may be appropriate for a situation but the behaviour/expression is louder, stronger, and lasts longer
- Unexpected occurrences of laughing, crying or angry yelling by the individual
- Emotional liability is another term for mood swings

WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE?

- The individual may present as happy one moment and suddenly sad the next, without any obvious reason
- Emotional reactions may be inappropriate to the situation at hand
- Emotional reaction may be appropriate to the situation; however, behaviours/expression may be louder and last longer

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE CAUSES AND COMPLICATIONS?

Possible causes:

- Unawareness of emotions (their own and other's)
- Inability to control the expression of emotions
- Inability to stop emotions from coming out
- Triggers for mood swings may include:
 - Fatigue/tiredness
 - Stress, worry, anxiety
 - Over-stimulating environment (too demanding, too noisy, too many people)
 - Pressure or demands from others
 - Sad or funny situation (e.g. movies, jokes)
 - The discussion of certain topics (e.g. loss of job, death of a family member)

Possible complications:

- The individual may become embarrassed and self-conscious by emotional outbursts
- Emotional outbursts may be misinterpreted and difficult for others to understand
- As a result of mood swings, the individual may isolate and withdraw socially, which may negatively impacting relationships and their social network

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Try to understand why mood swings may be occurring and identify any possible triggers
- Reassure and calm the person when necessary
- Remove yourself to give time for the individual to calm themselves
- Ignore the behaviour as much as possible, carry on conversations with others
- Change the topic or the activity
- Encourage the person to give basic explanations to others about their mood swings, let others know what they can do (e.g. "when I am nervous I may giggle, ignore me and it will stop")
- Plan activities with the individual's ability in mind (i.e. plan more demanding activities/appointments when the person is well rested)
- encourage the individual to think of something else, imagine a peaceful image, count
- Redirect the individual by switching the task/activity (i.e. go for a walk, listen to music, etc.)
- Promote an understanding for others as to why the mood swings occur and how to react in those situations
- Avoid focusing on outward signs of mood swings

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