Emotional Changes After a Traumatic Brain Injury

Some people with Traumatic Brain Injury or “TBI” often have a hard time controlling their emotions.

“EMOTIONAL LABILITY”

Some people with TBI may have intense mood swings. They may go from feeling happy, to angry, to sad very quickly. Usually they can’t control this.

“EMOTIONAL LABILITY” can be caused by damage to the parts of the brain that control emotion.

Dr. Cushing told me that my emotions will probably become “more normal” after the first few months.

SO WHAT CAN I DO?

That’s great! Counseling can help you manage your emotions better. There are also medications that can stabilize mood.

For now my family and I are talking to counselors to help us cope.

If you or your loved one are experiencing this, the first step is to talk to your doctor.

Great question! Here’s a list of a few things you can do to help...

1. Remain Calm. Avoid reacting emotionally.
2. Gently change the subject or suggest doing something else.
3. Get them to a quiet area. This will help them regain control.
4. Give the person a chance to talk calmly.
5. Acknowledge their feelings.
6. Provide feedback gently and supportively after they regain control.

http://depts.washington.edu/tbicomic/
Anxiety is a feeling of fear or nervousness that’s too strong for the situation. People with TBI may feel anxious without knowing why...

People with TBI may get anxious about how well they’re able to do things.

Being rushed, being in crowds, or sudden changes in plans can cause anxiety.

This reminds me of the accident...

Post traumatic stress disorder is a form of anxiety that can occur after an accident and can be triggered by reminders of the injury.

Sometimes the memory of how a person got injured gets played over in their head and interferes with sleep.

Why Does Anxiety Happen?

After a TBI, anxiety is very common, especially when there are a lot of demands, like taking a test, or being in a noisy environment.

Anxiety often happens when there are too many demands on a person...

I get anxious when I’m driving, especially when I’m trying to find someplace new.

I’m getting anxious just thinking about that stuff...

So What Can I Do About Anxiety?

Try to reduce environmental stresses that cause anxiety.

Counseling is good for managing anxiety, there are also medications that can help. Discuss these options with your doctor.

Exercise, breakfast, mow the lawn, visit with family.

Add structure or routine to daily activities.
What Can Be Done About Depression?

I started feeling really sad a few months after my injury, when I realized it would have a long term impact on my life...

Depression is not a sign of weakness. You can’t just “get over it”. Depression is an illness.

Aerobic exercise and daily routines helped me reduce my depression.

Either counseling, medication, or a combination of both can help some people with depression.

It’s best to take action as soon as possible. If you or someone you love has these symptoms, talk to your doctor. Don’t wait!

http://depts.washington.edu/tbi/
Family members or individuals with TBI often describe having a “short fuse” or a quick temper.

Studies show that 71% of people with TBI are frequently irritable.

People with TBI get angry for many reasons...

- I’m frustrated and unhappy with how my life has changed.
- I lost my job and a lot of my independence.
- I get tired easily.
- I forget things and can’t concentrate well.
- I feel alone, depressed and misunderstood.
- I have damage to the part of my brain that controls emotions.

What can I do about my temper and irritability?

Reduce stress and decrease irritating situations.
People with TBI can learn some basic anger management skills like self-calming, relaxation techniques and better communication.

Why does this happen?

http://depts.washington.edu/tbicomic/
Don't take it personally, remember their anger is due to their injury.

Don't argue with them while they are having an outburst, let them calm down first.

When the person is calm, set rules for communication.

Don't give in just to calm them down after the outburst is over; have a conversation.

Some other ways to calm down are meditation, leaving the room, or going for a short walk (but make sure to tell people when you will be back).

What's the next step?

If you or someone in your family is dealing with depression, anxiety or emotional lability...

Talk to your doctor and ask them if medication, a psychological evaluation, or counseling could help.

Counseling, medication, or a combination of both can be helpful when working with a doctor.
A brain injury support group can be a fantastic source of peer support; some groups are open to people with TBI or their family members; other groups are open to everyone.
SOURCE

The health information presented in this Graphic Fact Sheet is based on evidence from research and/or professional consensus and has been reviewed and approved by an editorial team of experts from the TBI Model Systems.

AUTHORSHIP AND ILLUSTRATION

This content was taken from the document Emotional Problems after TBI, which was developed by Tessa Hart, PhD and Keith Cicerone, PhD, in collaboration with the Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center. Portions of the original Document were adapted from materials developed by the UAB TBI Model System, the Carolinas Rehabilitation and Research System, and from Picking up the Pieces after TBI: A Guide for Family Members, by Angelle M. Sander, PhD, Baylor College of Medicine (2002).

Emotional Problems after TBI, was adapted into this Graphic Fact Sheet by Silas James and Illustrated by Matthew Cory.

Funding for this project was provided by Veterans Training Support Center; University of Washington; University of Washington TBI Model System; Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs; King County; and National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, Department of Education, Grant #H133A120028

This document is to be distributed free of charge. TBIMS retains ownership of both this document and its content, any modification is prohibited. © TBIMS, 2014

http://depts.washington.edu/tbicomic/