

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY AND CHRONIC PAIN

Part III: Managing Spasticity



Spasticity

A TBI can cause damage in the brain or to the nerves that makes muscles not respond how they should, this is called spasticity. Spasticity is not pain, but it can be painful. It may make muscles stay flexed when they should be relaxed or make them shake in a way that is hard to control. Over time spasticity can cause muscles to lengthen or shorten, which can cause pain. Not enough sleep, stress, infection, or pain in another part of the body can make spasticity worse.

Slow controlled stretching and low impact strength training can help control spasticity. Other techniques that are often used to manage pain can also work well for spasticity. Relaxation and mindfulness strategies can also help. Yoga uses slow movements, stretching, strengthening and mindful breathing to help you be more connected and in control of your body. Because of this yoga can be very helpful for people with spasticity. There are many different ways to practice yoga, you may need to try a few before you find the right one for you.



MY MUSCLES DON'T EXACTLY DO WHAT I WANT THEM TO, SO EVEN BASIC THINGS ARE CHALLENGING.



MY LIFE HAS BECOME MUCH SMALLER BECAUSE I TALK MYSELF OUT OF DOING THINGS THAT WILL BE HARD.



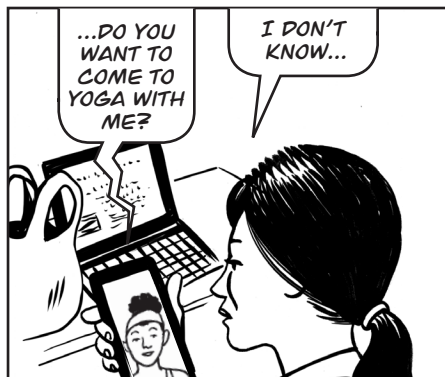


I HAD ANXIETY THAT I WOULD FALL OR DO SOMETHING EMBARRASSING IN PUBLIC, SO I AVOIDED LOTS OF SITUATIONS, AND THAT DECREASED MY ACTIVITY, WHICH MADE MY SPASTICITY AND BALANCE WORSE.

There are many different ways to manage spasticity: stretching, strength training, mobility exercises, heat packs, oral medication, botox injections, motor blocks, or baclofen pumps could be used. Talk with your health care provider to learn more about these options.



I SLIPPED INTO A CYCLE OF DEPRESSION, WHERE THE LESS I DID, THE LESS I WAS ABLE TO DO, THE LESS I WANTED TO DO.



I WAS VERY ACTIVE BEFORE MY INJURY, BUT SINCE THEN THERE HAVE BEEN A LOT OF OBSTACLES.



I UNDERSTAND, DO YOU MIND IF I STOP BY FOR A MINUTE? I HAVE SOMETHING FOR YOU...

SURE!

On Demand Pain Management Strategy #2

DISTRACTION – Pain needs an audience. If you're not paying attention to your pain, it will trouble you less. Some things you can try to take your mind off of pain:

- Read or watch TV.
- Listen to music or a podcast.
- Do some cleaning.
- Focus on your breathing.
- Play cards or a game.
- Do some gardening.



I GOT YOU THIS.

A YOGA MAT?

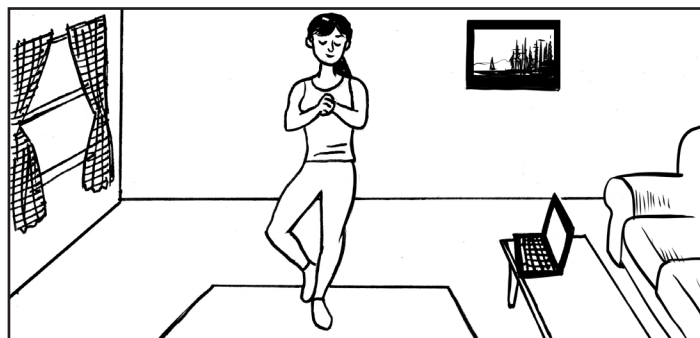


I THOUGHT THAT WE COULD DO YOGA...HERE!

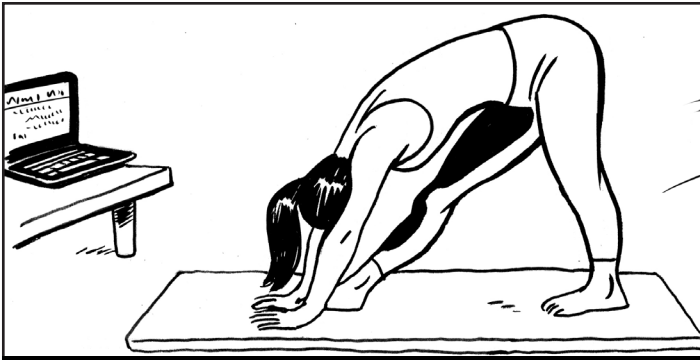
THAT'D BE GREAT, I WON'T FEEL SO SELF-CONSCIOUS!



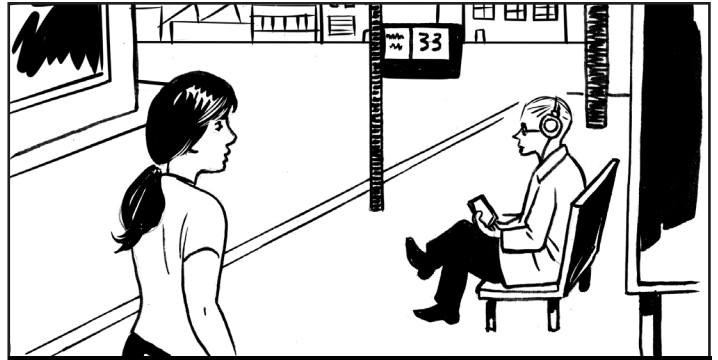
SONIA CAME TO MY HOUSE EVERY WEDNESDAY AND WE CAUGHT UP AND DID YOGA FOR AN HOUR.



I ALSO STARTED DOING YOGA DAILY WITH ONLINE VIDEOS. SOME POSES WERE HARD, BUT I COULD ALWAYS FIND MODIFICATIONS THAT WORKED FOR ME.



I SAW RESULTS ALMOST RIGHT AWAY, THE DAILY STRETCHING HELPED REDUCE MY SPASTICITY.



AS MY BALANCE IMPROVED, I GOT MORE COMFORTABLE WITH MORE ACTIVITY.



IN THE COMMUNITY MY WALKING WAS FASTER AND MORE STABLE.



BEING ABLE TO MORE EASILY DO THINGS EXPANDED MY LIFE. WHEN I STOPPED FEELING ISOLATED MY DEPRESSION BECAME MORE MANAGEABLE.

BOTH ANTI-DEPRESSANT MEDICATIONS AND COUNSELING CAN ALSO BE VERY HELPFUL AT MANAGING DEPRESSION.



READ MORE ABOUT EMOTIONAL CHANGES AFTER TBI IN THIS COMIC:
<https://msktc.org/tbi-topics/emotional-problems-after-tbi>

Activity Log

You can use this log to track activities or events that may be related to pain.
This log can also be used to record your pain management practice.

Date/Time	What was happening? (Event or activity)	For how long/ When?	Did you have pain? (0-10) (Where?)	Other emotions?	What thoughts did you have?	What did you do in response?

Authorship and Illustration

This infocomic was written by Silas James and Ayla Jacob and illustrated by David Lasky and Tom Dougherty, in collaboration with the Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center.

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