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.

How can your family help?

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.

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Anxiety is a feeling of fear or nervousness that's too strong for the situation. People with TBI may feel anxious without knowing why...

I'm afraid of making mistakes and that makes me feel like everyone is watching and judging me, even when they probably aren't.

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.

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...

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

So What Can I Do About Anxiety?

Try to reduce environmental stresses that cause anxiety.

Exercise.
Breakfast.
Mow the lawn.
Visit friends.

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

Add structure or routine to daily activities.

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What can be done about depression?

- 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!
STUDIES SHOW THAT 71% OF PEOPLE WITH TBI ARE FREQUENTLY IRRITABLE.

WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

PEOPLE WITH TBI GET ANGRY FOR MANY REASONS...

...I’m frustrated and unhappy with how my life has changed.

...I’m in a lot of pain.

...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.

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Counseling, medication or a combination of both can be helpful when working with a doctor.

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.

Make sure they know that it is not ok to threaten to hurt people or yell at them.

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.

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**MORE ABOUT MEDICATIONS**

**IF YOU OR YOUR FAMILY MEMBER ARE TAKING MEDICATIONS FOR ANY OF THESE PROBLEMS IT’S IMPORTANT TO WORK CLOSELY WITH YOUR DOCTOR AND BE SURE TO KEEP YOUR FOLLOW UP APPOINTMENTS.**

**IT MAY TAKE SOME TIME TO SEE RESULTS. BE PATIENT.**

**THERE CAN BE A DELAY BEFORE THE MEDICATION STARTS WORKING.**

**YOUR DOSE MAY NEED TO BE ADJUSTED BY YOUR DOCTOR OR YOU MAY NEED TO TRY DIFFERENT MEDICATIONS BEFORE YOU FIND THE ONE THAT WORKS BEST. EXCEPT IN AN EMERGENCY, DO NOT STOP TAKING THE MEDICATION YOUR DOCTOR HAS PRESCRIBED WITHOUT TALKING TO THEM FIRST.**

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**PEER SUPPORT AND OTHER RESOURCES**

**WE CAN HELP!**

**I LAUGH AT STRANGE TIMES. I HAD THAT TOO. IT GOT BETTER AFTER A FEW MONTHS.**

**REMEMBER NOT ALL HELP COMES FROM HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS!**

**PEER MENTORING IS WHEN SOMEBODY WHO IS IN THE SAME SITUATION HELPS YOU COPE WITH PROBLEMS THEY MAY HAVE DEALT WITH THEMSELVES.**

**CONTACT YOUR LOCAL BRAIN INJURY ORGANIZATION TO FIND OUT WHAT RESOURCES THEY MAY BE ABLE TO OFFER!**

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*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.*

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[https://msktc.org/tbi](https://msktc.org/tbi)
AUTHORSHIP AND ILLUSTRATION

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