



## PERSONAL GUIDE FOR EVERYDAY LIVING AFTER CONCUSSION/TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

This guide was developed to help you better understand what you may be experiencing following your injury. The better you understand the conditions that can have an impact on you, what can be difficult situations for you, and which strategies to try, the more you will succeed in life.

“**CONDITIONS**” likely to make symptoms worse:

- A. Being **TIRED**
- B. Being **EMOTIONAL** – sad, frustrated, excited, angry, etc.
- C. Being **UNDER PRESSURE**, being **RUSHED, STRESSED or ANXIOUS**
- D. Being **DRUNK/UNDER THE INFLUENCE** of drugs (Prescription or not)
- E. Being in **PAIN**
- F. Being **SICK**

**STRATEGIES** to consider for each state:

- A. **Tired:** Do not allow yourself to become tired. **Plan** things that you need to do and complete them early whenever possible. **Slow down** and **check** your work. Stick to a fairly regular sleep schedule and make sure you get enough sleep at night.
- B. **Emotional:** If you become emotional, **slow down** and **think before** you speak or act. Remember that being tired can make you become more emotional. If you know that you are going into a potentially emotional situation, **plan** as much as possible so that you are ready.
- C. **Stress/Pressure:** Avoid being rushed, stressed or under pressure by **planning**. Lay out things to do in a **planner** (calendar), allowing plenty of time for each task. Especially when you are rushed, **slow down** to allow yourself time to think clearly and look for missed details. Take the time to make **checklists** so nothing is missed. **Check** off each step as it is completed.
- D. **Alcohol/Drugs:** Do not drink alcohol or take drugs. Many people with brain injuries report feeling out of control without adding to it with alcohol or drugs. Know that your symptoms are likely to be enhanced while you are under the influence. Know also that drugs and alcohol have been reported to lower seizure threshold, making your chances of having a seizure greater.
- E. **Pain:** Avoid getting in pain when possible. When avoiding pain is not possible, attempt to relieve it as soon as possible. Do pain management exercises as recommended. Take medications as prescribed. Know that pain medications may affect your thinking ability. Use proper body mechanics, etc. Keep expectations realistic when you are in pain. **Allow more time** to do things when in pain. **Plan ahead and check** your work.

- F. **Sickness:** Avoid getting sick. Keep a regular schedule. Get enough sleep. Rest when sick. Cold medications may effect thinking ability. **Allow more time** to do things when sick. **Plan ahead. Check your work.**

Note that many of the same strategies were repeated over and over. Summed up briefly, the keys to improving performance are:

1. **Slowing down**
2. **Organizing yourself**
3. **Planning ahead, and**
4. **Checking your work**

Over time, all of these strategies can become a natural part of your daily life. Most likely, they will eventually make you more efficient, accurate and thorough; although in the beginning they may feel strange, intrusive and time-consuming.

**\*\*Give the strategies – and yourself – time\*\***

**SITUATIONS** that may prove difficult (Fill in the blank lines with tasks that fit your life.)

- A. **Sustained Attention Tasks** – Keeping your attention focused on one thing (Fill in the blanks with situations that fit your life.)
  1. Reading a magazine, book, etc.
  2. Listening to a lecture
  3. Listening on the phone
  4. Writing a letter, report, checklist, etc.
  5. \_\_\_\_\_
  6. \_\_\_\_\_
  
- B. **Simultaneous/Divided Attention Tasks** – Keeping your attention on 2 or more things at a time.
  1. Cooking dinner while watching television
  2. Listening to a lecture while taking notes
  3. Talking on the phone while writing a message
  4. Counting the number of items on a conveyor while simultaneously looking for broken pieces
  5. Keeping your eye on your young child while trying to write a letter
  6. \_\_\_\_\_
  7. \_\_\_\_\_
  
- C. **Alternating Attention Tasks** – Needing to switch your attention between two things.
  1. Stop typing to answer the phone, then go back to typing
  2. Stop doing your work at your desk to answer a question, then go back to work
  3. Stop making dinner to clean up a spill, then knowing where you left off
  4. Stop paying the bills to ask your spouse where some receipts are, then finishing
  5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

**ATTENTION** – Very often a significant problem after brain injury.

**A. Increase your Awareness of Distractors** – Try to determine what types of things tend to distract you. Are they:

1. **Internal Distractors** – your own thoughts, emotions, being tired, in pain, sick, etc.  
**and/or**
2. **External Distractors** – things in the environment:
  - a. Auditory – any noise: people talking, machines or air conditioners humming, cars driving by, etc.
  - b. Visual – people walking by, a ceiling fan spinning, miscellaneous papers on your desk, a spider crawling on the wall, etc.
  - c. Tactile/Sensation – an uncomfortable chair, an itchy rash, being too hot or cold, etc.

**B. Anticipate Distractors - Learn what tends to distract you**

1. Minimize these things whenever possible (for example, sit with your back to a distracting environment)
2. Eliminate them whenever possible (see below)

**C. Eliminate Distractors – Take Control**

1. Strategies for **Internal Distractors**
  - a. Try to eliminate the distractor by actually doing the thing that is distracting you (i.e.: check to see if the stove is off, go mail the letter you are afraid you'll forget, etc.)
  - b. Write the distractor down, decide to put it out of your mind for now and come back to it at a more appropriate time
  - c. Overtly tell yourself, "I'm distracted and I need to get back to work"
  - d. Get enough sleep to increase your ability to control your attention
2. Strategies for **External Distractors**
  - a. Turn off the radio, T.V., ceiling fan, air conditioner, etc.
  - b. Go to a quiet room
  - c. Close your door, windows, curtains
  - d. Wear earplugs
  - e. Ask people to quiet down
  - f. Clear your desk of papers before working
  - g. Overtly tell yourself, "I'm distracted and I need to get back to work."
  - h. Get enough sleep to increase your ability to control your attention

**USE OLD STRATEGIES** to your advantage:

- A. **Make a list of strategies** that you used before you were injured. Everyone uses strategies – they just don’t think of them as strategies because that is the “normal” way they do things.
1. To help you in creating this list, mentally go through all of the things you do during the day
  2. Next, write down all the things you do to make these things easier  
Examples:
    - a. Sticking to a routine when getting ready in the morning
    - b. Making a list of chores, assignments, phone calls, etc., for the day
    - c. Reviewing your day over morning coffee
    - d. Planning what you will say during an important meeting or confrontation
    - e. Referring to your desk calendar throughout the day
    - f. Setting a cooking timer to remind you when to check the oven
    - g. Laying out your clothes the day before
    - h. And on and on
- B. Do **NOT** discard these strategies now! Now they will be more important than ever! Do not decide to “test” your memory by not writing something down. You wrote things down before from time to time, didn’t you? There was a reason for it. **Do it!**
- C. **Build on old strategies.** Examples:
1. If you used a checklist to help you remember your chores, see where else in your day you can use a checklist.
  2. If you used a routine to help you get out of the house in the morning, see if you can incorporate one into your workday.
  3. If you used a calendar to keep track of your workday, maybe you can use one to organize your home life.

Know that in the end, things can go back to feeling “normal” again, even if that new “normal” is different than the old one. **In the meantime, know who you can go to for help and support.**

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