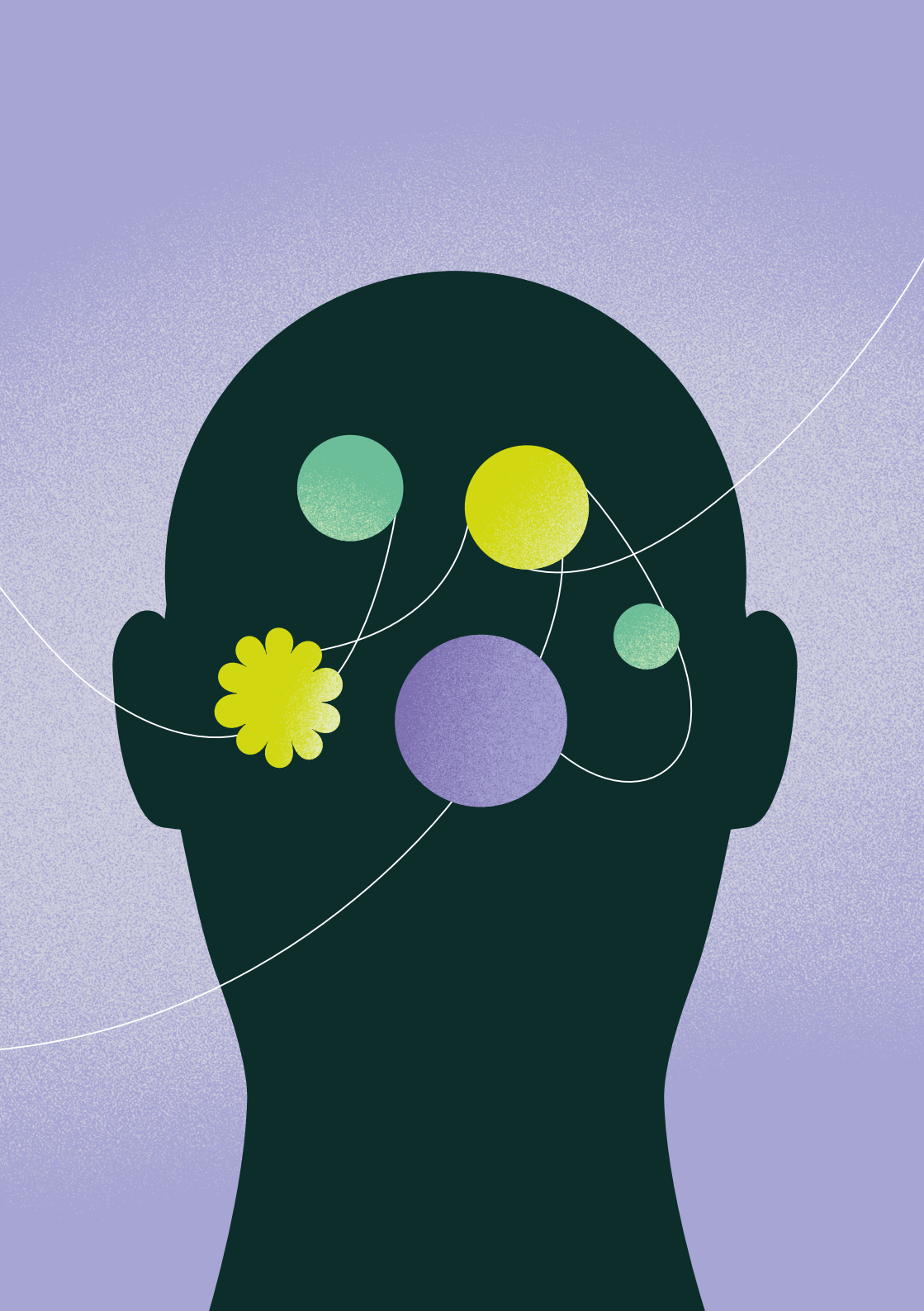




Tips and Tricks for life after a brain injury



Have you been told that you may have had a brain injury? Living with a brain injury is sometimes described as living with a “hidden disability”, because your difficulties can’t always be seen.

It is understandable that you may be feeling worried, confused, or even frustrated. It may feel like you have been thrown into a world you know little about but are expected to quickly understand and cope with. This booklet will give you information on a range of topics including, remembering, getting organised, and dealing with difficult emotions.



What having a brain injury may mean for you?

Just because you look fine, doesn't mean you are fine. Brain injury is often called a 'hidden disability' because no one can see it. This does not mean that the problems you are experiencing are not real.

Having a "mild" brain injury does not necessarily mean that you have "mild" problems. A "mild" brain injury can still mean that you have difficulties managing everyday life.

You may have noticed that you:

- struggle with certain things like remembering or finding the right words for things.
- feel tired more easily and find it harder to get started on things than before.
- are more sensitive to light or sound and find busy, noisy environments stressful.
- find it harder to control your emotions or get frustrated more easily.
- feel different to before but are not sure why?

Managing your emotions

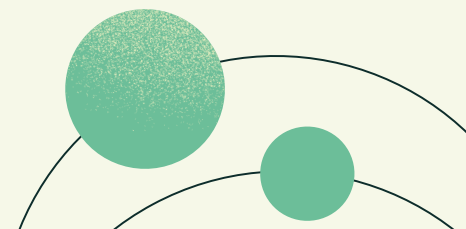
You may have noticed changes in the way you respond to things, or other people may have told you that you have changed. People with a brain injury may have difficulty managing their emotions.

- Anger and frustration: You may notice that you get frustrated more quickly or respond more impulsively.
- Things that previously didn't bother you might make you feel angry and frustration.
- You may find you cry more easily or feel very low. On these days it may feel hard to find the energy to do anything.
- You may notice that your moods are less predictable than they used to be and you from being calm to suddenly feeling angry or sad.

You may experience all, some, or none of these changes. You may have good days and bad days. On the next page are some tips and tricks that might help.

Things that can help

- Learn to notice the early signs that you are getting frustrated or angry.
- It can be helpful to take time out and remove yourself from situations when you feel the early signs of frustration.
- Regulate your breathing by taking deep slow breaths. This can really help to calm your body down.
- Exercise can also make you feel better. Try doing a mini workout in your room (e.g. press-ups, squats, or sit-ups). Set yourself a goal to try and beat it!
- Listen to relaxing music.
- Everyone finds it hard to talk to people about their feelings, but it can be helpful if you have someone to confide in.
- Keeping a diary can help you work out what situations make you frustrated or feel low.
- It's hard but try not to compare yourself with friends or others around you.



Remembering

Does this sound a bit like you?

“I often forget my appointments.”

“I can’t remember what people have said to me.”

Do people complain because you always forget to do things?

Forgetting things after a brain injury is normal but it is likely to make you feel annoyed, frustrated, angry or scared.

Having memory problems can be tiring as you need to make an effort to remember. Your memory can also get worse when you are tired.

It is normal to remember the past, but remembering new things may be harder.

Things that can help

- You may find it helpful to write down what you need to remember in a notebook or diary.
- You could try writing all your appointments on a timetable and sticking it on your wall.
- Having a routine can also help as it reduces how much you have to remember.
- When you are given new information to remember you could try saying over and over a few times.
- Some people find creating visual images helps them to remember information.
- If you can’t remember something, try your best not to panic. Relax and give it a moment. Often, if you stop trying to remember it, it will come to you.
- Sometimes we can remember things better when we are relaxed, so do things that you enjoy, like listening to music.
- To avoid losing things, always put them in the same place.

Getting organised

Do you find you are not prepared for something when you should be?

Do people get frustrated with you because you can't think about what you are going to do this afternoon, let alone tomorrow?

Trying to think about and plan what you are going to do can be really difficult for some people following a brain injury.

- Do you find it difficult to plan what you want to do?
- Do you then find it hard to stick to your plan?
- Do you find yourself doing the same thing over and over even when it isn't working?
- Do you find being in new situations overwhelming?

Don't worry, there are plenty of things you can do to help.

Things that can help

- Routines are helpful. They help you remember what you need to do each day. Don't be afraid to write down a plan or ask someone to help you. Once you get into the routine, you might not need the plan anymore.
- Don't rush yourself. Give yourself time.
- Ask other people to help you plan something. You could say "I'm preparing for ... can you think of anything else I should do?"
- Have step-by-step lists to help you with things you find difficult. For example, what you need to do to pay a bill or how to get to an appointment.
- Tick off each thing on your list or plan when you have completed it. This way you won't leave anything out and you will get a sense of achievement.

Focusing

Have people told you that you don't listen to them properly?

Do you have difficulty focusing on more than one thing at a time?

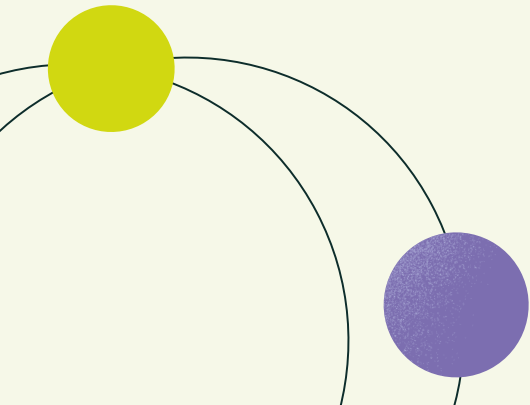
Maybe you have to stop what you are doing if someone starts talking to you.

Do you get distracted easily?

For example, you might find it hard to focus on one thing for a long time, like watching a film, or you might start looking out the window when someone is talking to you.

What you can do

- Sleep is important, as it can be harder to focus when you are tired. Having a good routine to promote sleep is really important.
- Taking time to wind down before you go to sleep is important. Maybe listen to music or read.
- If you have lots of thoughts running through your mind try imagining your favourite place.
- Regular exercise can help improve your sleep.
- Write a to do list before you go to sleep to stop you worrying about things.
- Don't try to do new or difficult things when you are tired.
- Break large activities down into small, easy tasks. If you have a lot of things to do, complete them one at a time rather than trying to do everything in one go.
- Explain to other people that you may need to take lots of breaks and not rush. This might mean that it takes you a bit longer to get something done but that's okay. You could say "I find it hard to concentrate. Can I do ten minutes work and then take a break?"



Communication

Do people say you are rude when you are speaking to them? Maybe you find it difficult to keep up with conversations or say the right thing.

Do you get annoyed because you can't find the right words for what you want to say, or have trouble putting words in the right order?

Do you get confused about when it is your turn to talk in a conversation or interrupt people without meaning to?

Do people tell you that you misinterpret their words or actions?

Maybe you don't think before you say things, which might mean that you swear more or say the wrong things?

Do people fall out with you when you don't think you've done anything wrong?

Things that can help

- You could ask people you trust to gently point out when your behaviour offends or upsets them. This will make you more aware of what you are doing, and you can think about how you might respond differently.
- Listen carefully to other people. Make sure you understand what they are saying before you respond.
- Do not be embarrassed to ask people to say things again if you didn't understand. It can be useful to write things down to help you remember.
- If you feel yourself becoming frustrated in a conversation remove yourself from the situation and return when you are calm.

Relationships

Do you find it difficult to meet new people or find yourself falling out with people you care about?

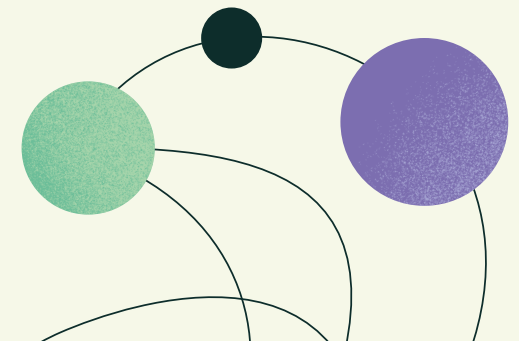
The problems that we have been talking about can make it harder to be in a relationship with someone. If you have been having these difficulties, your friends, family, or partner may not understand why you are acting in a certain way. It isn't surprising if you are left feeling lonely.

Have you been finding it difficult to tell people how you feel and show others that you still care for them?

Have you been feeling like you can't be bothered to go out with friends or family? Maybe you find it hard to be around lots of people.

Things that can help

- Share this leaflet your friends and family, it might help them understand what you are going through.
- Talk with the family and friends about your experience and what it means for you.
- You might feel like withdrawing and not being around others, but it is really important to stay in touch with people
- Don't be embarrassed to admit you are struggling, everyone finds life difficult at some point. You might be surprised what people share with you.



Alcohol and drugs

Alcohol and street drugs have a serious effects. This can be hard to accept when you just want to go out and forget about your problem. It is important to be aware that after a brain injury the body's tolerance to alcohol is greatly reduced.

This means that you may experience more effects than normal when drinking the same amount or even less than you used to.

Here are some ways that alcohol can affect you:

- It can make your problems worse. For example, alcohol can make your memory worse.
- Although drinking alcohol might make you happy for a little while, it can make you feel very low later and even lower if you carry on drinking.
- Using alcohol or illegal drugs after a brain injury can increase your risk of seizures (fits). You should speak with your GP about this.

Things that can help

The best advice is not to drink alcohol or use illegal drugs at all, but we know this isn't easy.

- Some people do say that giving up alcohol completely is actually easier than trying to cut down on how much you drink.
- You could try non-alcoholic beers or lagers.
- Street drugs are illegal, so it is important that you don't take them.
- If you are struggling with drug and alcohol use, seek support through your local substance misuse service or speak with your GP about how they can support you.

Money

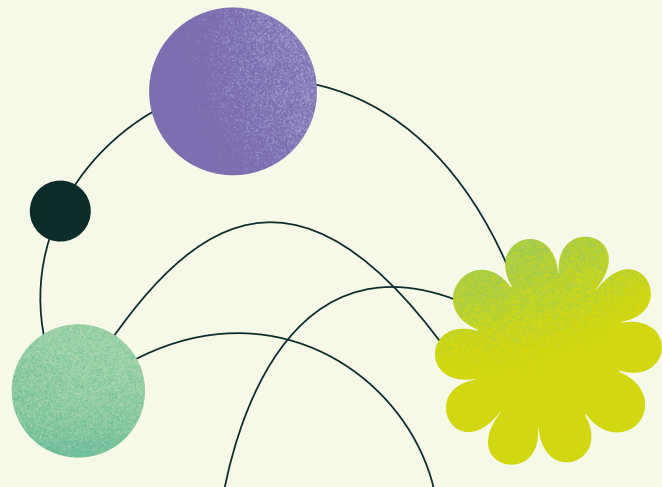
Managing money can be difficult for many people after a brain injury.

Here are a few money problems you might be having:

- Not being able to plan ahead, like saving up for a bill.
- Buying things impulsively when you don't need them.
- Spending all your money in one go without saving any.
- Getting into debt.

Things that can help

- Write a list so you know exactly what you need to buy.
- Buy the things you really need first.
- Use reminders (on a calendar or diary) to help you remember important things like when you have to pay a bill.
- Write down when you have bought something so you can keep track of your spending.
- Ask a trusted friend or family member to help you budget.
- Lending money to friends might feel like a nice thing to do but always check you have enough and make sure you ask when they will pay you back.
- There are lots of charities that can give money advice and your local council may also have people that will support you in getting the correct benefits. It is always better to seek advice sooner rather than later.



Wellbeing

Have you noticed changes to your health and wellbeing?

Maybe your family have commented that you are doing less than you used to.

You may have noticed:

- You get more headaches than you used to.
- You get tired really easily.
- You have difficulties moving your body and find it hard to balance.
- You may feel you have less motivation to do things and find it hard to get started.

Things that can help

There are lots of things you can do to improve your wellbeing

- Spend time with people you care about
- Having a good routine, getting up and going to bed at similar times each day
- Doing activities in short bursts so you don't exhaust yourself
- Rest periods in the day can help maintain energy levels
- Making sure you do activities you enjoy as well as chores
- Keep active, it will give you a sense of achievement and make you feel better
- Listen to music, go for walks, stay in touch with nature

Getting help

If you need further help or advice:

Brain Injury

www.brainkind.org

www.headway.org.uk

Health information

www.nhs.uk

Mental Health and Wellbeing

www.mind.org.uk

www.samaritans.org

www.ageuk.org.uk

Brainkind

Brainkind (formerly The Disabilities Trust & BIRT) is the UK's leading charity helping people thrive after a brain injury. We provide innovative rehabilitation and ongoing support to ensure life after brain injury can be a life well lived.

With over 40 years of experience and expertise in brain injury and neurorehabilitation, we understand how a brain injury can challenge every aspect of life. At Brainkind, we are committed to providing person-centered, compassionate care. Our multi-disciplinary teams deliver the very best specialist neurological care and rehabilitation. Led by clinical psychiatrists and neuropsychologists, our team includes occupational therapists, physiotherapists, nurses, speech & language therapists, social workers, therapy assistants, and rehabilitation support workers.

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