

# TBI TODAY

NEWS, IDEAS, AND RESOURCES FROM THE VIRGINIA TBI MODEL SYSTEM

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## Soft Belly Relaxation Can Reduce Mental and Physical Stress

by Michael Cerreto

After a traumatic brain injury, many people wrestle with the stress of a life impacted by struggles with language, attention, mobility, memory, and self-care. These struggles can cause you to be highly stressed throughout the day. Your stress level can impact your mind in different ways.

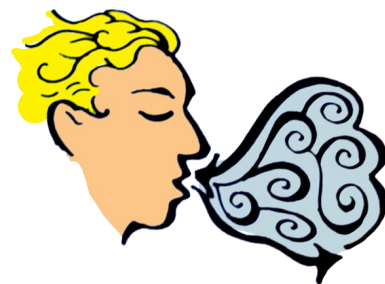
- A research study by the Weill Medical College at Cornell University and Rockefeller University found that stress can limit your ability to focus attention and to access the full potential of your brain.
- Researcher Robert J. Ferguson, Ph.D. at the Maine Rehabilitation Center found that applied relaxation techniques for patients' stress can help improve attention and memory.

To reduce stress and enhance your mind's ability to process information, you can use a relaxation technique called Soft Belly.

To relax with Soft Belly, you need to get into a comfortable position and take a few deep, cleansing breaths in through your nose and out from your mouth. Then, continue breathing deeply in through your nose and out from your mouth. Each inhale and exhale should last for about five seconds. As you breathe, notice your belly moving out and in. Try to make your belly as soft, flexible, and rhythmic as possible as you breathe. Focus on the slow motion of your soft belly, and focus on blowing out tension in your body with each exhale.

Continue Soft Belly until you are completely relaxed.

The best part of Soft Belly relaxation is that you can use it anytime and anywhere when you feel stressed. It is your portable relaxation method.



Michael Cerreto, MS, CPCRT, CSC, LDR is a Certified Cognitive Rehabilitation Therapist with **A Talented Mind Clinic** in Richmond, Virginia. He helps children, adolescents, and adults with a TBI improve the quality of their daily lives. He also facilitates **The Comeback Project** that is a free, private online community for brain injury survivors and their families. You can join the community to get the support you need at: [a-talented-mind.mightybell.com](http://a-talented-mind.mightybell.com). If you have any ideas for a future article about cognitive rehabilitation, please contact Michael at [cerreto@atalentedmind.com](mailto:cerreto@atalentedmind.com).



# Mark Your Calendar

## Aphasia Support Group

- ♦ **When:** 2nd Thursday of the month 6-7pm
- ♦ **Location:** First Unitarian Universalist Church, 1000 Blanton Ave, Richmond, 23221 in the President's Room
- ♦ **Contact:** Susan Hapala at (804) 908-3261 or Jan Thomas at rva.aphasia@gmail.com

## Support Group for Adults with TBI, Family, and Friends

- ♦ **When:** 3rd Monday of the month 6:15pm-7:45pm
- ♦ **Location:** Disability Law Center of Virginia, 1512 Willow Lawn Drive, Suite 100, Richmond, 23230
- ♦ **Contact:** Christine Baggini at (804) 355-5748 or christine@biav.net

## Supportive Survivors

- ♦ **When:** 2nd, 4th, and 5th Tuesdays 6-8pm, Outings planned for the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays
- ♦ **Location:** Regency Mall Food Court, 1420 Parham Road, Richmond, 23229
- ♦ **Contact:** Ted Taylor at (804) 781-2144 or taylorted58@yahoo.com

## TGIF: Social Group for Adults with TBI and Family

- ♦ **When:** 1st Friday of the month
- ♦ **Contact:** Email Aleana McClellan at mcclellana@chesterfield.gov or call (804) 751-4134 to get on the mailing list.

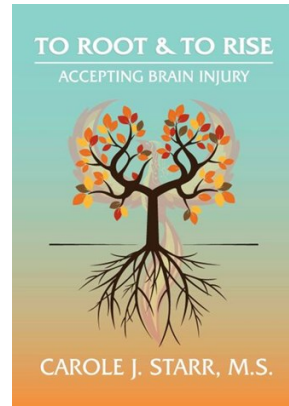
## Women's Luncheon Group

- ♦ **When:** 2nd Tuesday of the month for lunch 11:30am
- ♦ **Location:** The Mill House, 7812 Shrader Road, Henrico 23294
- ♦ **Contact:** Jen Candela at (804) 386-0926 x 104 or jennifer@communitybraininjury.org

Looking for a support group in your area? Check out [www.biav.net/virginia-support-groups.htm](http://www.biav.net/virginia-support-groups.htm) for more support groups organized by region!

*If you have an upcoming event of interest to the Brain Injury community in Virginia, we would be glad to consider including it here. Please call (804) 828-3704 or email [jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org](mailto:jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org).*

# BOOK REVIEW



**Title:** *To Root & To Rise: Accepting Brain Injury*

**Author:** Carole J. Starr

**Publisher:** Spiral Path Publishing, 2017

**ISBN:** 978-0-9986521-0-8

**Price:** \$18 (Paperback)

**Where to find it:**

[www.CaroleJStarr.com](http://www.CaroleJStarr.com) & [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com)

**Description:** 201 pages

*To Root & To Rise: Accepting Brain Injury* is Carole Starr's reflective and inspirational account of her journey after she sustained a traumatic brain injury in a car accident. The book portrays struggles she faced as she learned to cope with the loss of her old, uprooted life and accept her new, ever-rising life.

Rather than sharing a linear narrative, Carole uses each chapter to highlight an aspect of her long-term recovery, whether it be denial, self-esteem, things other people say, or finding purpose. With the use of relatable anecdotes and clever analogies, she shares the strategies she used to overcome these challenges. Each chapter concludes with worksheet-style questions and response blanks, inviting readers to reflect on their own approach to similar situations and explore ways to move forward.

The book is written carefully with brain injury survivors in mind. Considering the potential struggles those with brain injury may endure with long texts, Carole divided the book into smaller sections for easier processing. Additionally, the text is presented in a larger font size, allowing for better readability.

Overall, this book is a beneficial resource for brain injury survivors, caregivers, and professionals alike. Carole's thoughtfully designed guide allows those with brain injury to not only learn about her journey, but to connect with it and to learn more about, and even improve, their own.

Writing *To Root and to Rise* is only one way Carole has contributed to the brain injury community. Today, she continues to inspire others as a keynote speaker at brain injury conferences. She also founded and currently facilitates Brain Injury Voices, a support volunteer group of brain injury educators, advocates, and peer mentors. To learn more about Brain Injury Voices, visit [www.braininjuryvoices.org](http://www.braininjuryvoices.org).

## VCU TBI Model System Funded for Another Five Years

Dr. Jeffrey Kreutzer and Dr. David Cifu have been awarded over two million dollars to study outcomes and evaluate treatments for traumatic brain injury over the next five years. Funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) within the U.S. Dept. of Human and Health Services, *Administration for Community Living*, researchers in the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Traumatic Brain Injury Model System (TBIMS) will continue to collect outcome data and contribute to a national database, alongside 15 other centers in the nation with similar grants. VCU has been funded for the project since it began in 1987 and will additionally participate in other multi-site studies. The primary goal of our VCU center project is to evaluate the comparative effectiveness of skill-building, psychotherapeutic, and educational interventions focused on resiliency for persons with TBI.

Over the last thirty years, VCU clinical researchers have produced nearly 400 brain publications, including books and peer reviewed manuscripts. The VCU TBI Model System will also continue to carry out a wide variety of knowledge translation/dissemination activities, including the publication of TBI Today. For more information, contact Jenny Marwitz, [jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org](mailto:jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org) or visit <http://model.tbinrc.com>. For more information about the model systems programs, visit [www.msktc.org/tbi](http://www.msktc.org/tbi).

## Frequently Asked Questions

### QUESTION:

I can't seem to remember people's names after my brain injury. What can I do about this problem?

### ANSWER:

Here are some strategies for remembering names of people:

- ◇ First of all, **stop** what you're doing. **Look** at the person. And **listen** carefully to the name. If you don't catch their name when it was originally told to you, ask for it again. Saying it immediately will help you remember it when they walk away.
- ◇ **SAVE** the person's name.
  - **Say** the name at least 3 times in conversation. When first introduced, use the person's name several times as you talk to them.
  - **Ask** a question about their name or about the person.
  - **Visualize** or try to picture in your mind something about the person you are most likely to remember.
  - **End** the conversation with their name.
- ◇ **Repetition. Repetition. Repetition.**
  - Say the name silently to yourself a few times.
  - Try to use the person's name in conversation repeatedly.
  - Introducing the person to others can be an easy way to repeat the name without drawing attention.



# Finding Hope After My Truck Accident

by Jessica Green

My life changed on July 22, 2016. I was in a horrific accident involving my pick-up truck and a tractor trailer which left me with multiple life threatening injuries and a helicopter ride to VCU. My foot had been shattered beyond repair, and my spleen was removed while I was in the hospital. Everything appeared to be normal with my recovery, and I was about to be released after spending almost two weeks in the hospital. It was then that my speech became slurred and I had difficulty functioning altogether. I suffered multiple strokes and seizures from collapsed arteries. The damage had already been done, leaving me with a TBI. Stents were placed in my neck to keep me alive. I was one of those cases where if something could go wrong, it did go wrong. My husband deserted me while I was in the hospital, and thankfully, my family was there to support me. My "friends" have also deserted me since I am unable to do the things I used to do. From a physical perspective, I have limited movement and limited use of my whole right side, all as a result of my strokes and TBI.

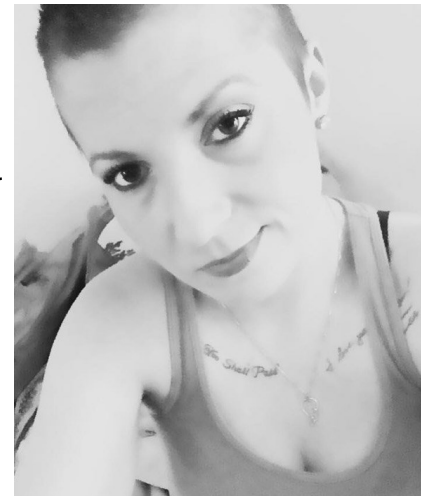


I went from being 100% independent to 100% dependent. I moved into my parents' house so they could care for me on a daily basis. I could not do anything on my own except breathe. I was taking almost 10 different medications, including seizure medicine, blood thinners, and blood pressure medicine, to name a few. At the time of my accident, my employers had not provided me with health insurance to get the necessary therapy I needed to improve. Now, after a year of trying to improve on my own, I am finally receiving assistance in seeking therapy. I have been recommended for 3 types of therapy: physical, speech, and occupational. I have been told by my doctors that when dealing with TBI recovery, I only have two years to gain back what has been lost. Often times, I find myself asking, "Why me? Why am I here? I didn't choose this life." I get frustrated easily, and getting irritated for no explained reason is very common and difficult to overcome at times.

I have had a tremendous amount of faith both before and after my accident. Since my accident, it has taken me a year to let go of the person I was before the accident and to accept the person I am now. Mentally, that has been one of the biggest challenges to overcome. Through everything with all of my injuries, especially my brain injury, I have enough faith to know that God has a bigger plan for me. There is a reason he kept me here.

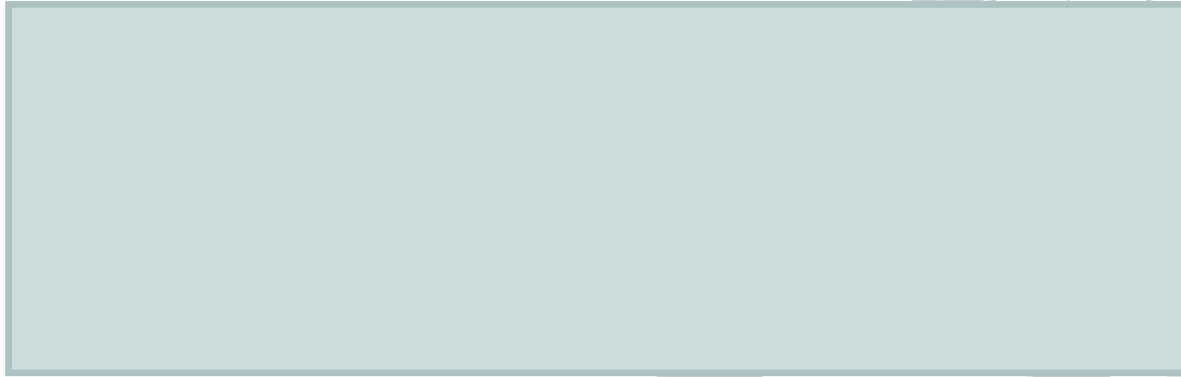
The painting and photography businesses I used to own and run were my passion. I have since started to try to get back to doing those things little bits at a time. To those who are experiencing the same thing, I pray that you never give up on the things that make you who you are. This experience has been extremely hard but I am learning to love the person I am even with my brain injury. Always be strong; you are better than your brain injury!

*"Life After Brain Injury. I'm doing the best that I can. My best may not be what it was before my brain injury....But it's still the BEST I CAN"*



## PICTURE THIS!

Can you solve the following visual word puzzles? Each one represents a phrase, and you may have to read in between the lines (literally)! Check your answers on page 7.



JUST FOR FUN

1.

**WORDS**  
**FUNNY WORDS**  
**FUNNY WORDS**  
**WORDS**

2.

**PROM / ISE**

3.

**CI II**

4.

**MILLONEION**

5.

**EGGS**  
**GESG**  
**SGEG**  
**ESGG**

6.

**R**  
**O**  
**R O A D S**  
**D**  
**S**

7.

**DEAL**

8.

***NOON GOOD***

9.

**KNEE**  
**LIGHTS**

## DEAR PAT,

Since my brain injury, I have had a really hard time keeping up with paying the bills. I've always been the one who manages our finances in the household. I was the one who was "good" with money. But now, I don't want anything to do with it! Just thinking about it makes my head hurt!!

I don't even want to deal with the mail when it comes in. I don't even know what bills we have because I just throw our mail into one pile in the corner. Then, I forget if I paid a bill or not. The whole thing is a mess, and I'm afraid to tell my husband because this is messing up our credit. I need help!



## PAT'S RESPONSE:

Feeling overwhelmed with managing household finances is common after brain injury, as organizational skills and memory functioning are often impacted by the injury. Following are some tips to help you address this problem.

Create a "home office" space where you have an area that is dedicated to paying bills. Keep these items in this space: a "Bills to Pay" folder, a "Bills to Pay" schedule, your checkbook, envelopes, stamps, calendar, and pens. As soon as you pick up your mail, separate bills to be paid from other mail. I would recommend choosing one day a week to handle the bills. On that day, pick a time when you are well-rested, minimize distractions as you work, and clear your work space or declutter before starting. Pay one bill at a time to avoid making mistakes. At the end, update your "Bills to Pay" schedule with the amount and date paid.

Another option to consider, either in place of or in conjunction with the "manual" system, is to set up automatic bill pay. Contact your bank to see which of your bills can be set using automatic debit from your bank account. You could also visit the creditor's website to see if they have options for electronic statements and online bill payments. Electronically, you could set up bills to be paid automatically with one credit card or use an online bill payment service.

Finally, working with a mental health counselor who specializes in working with persons with a TBI to help implement these strategies might be beneficial. You could contact your local chapter of the Brain Injury Association for a referral. In the meantime, try these strategies out to see if they work for you. You might also consider eliciting help from your husband. He could help you set up the system, suggest different ways of addressing the problem, and/or offer to take over the responsibility. Good luck!

CHAT



**Questions for Pat or the FAQ column are welcomed.**

**Send them to:**

**"ASK PAT" OR "FAQ"**

**P.O. BOX 980542. RICHMOND, VA 23298-0542**

**or e-mail: [jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org](mailto:jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org)**



## Join a Supportive Online Community for TBI Survivors and Families

The Comeback Project is a free, private online community for survivors of brain injury and their families to help you get your life back after a brain injury. You can join the community to share and get the support you need at: [a-talented-mind.mightybell.com](http://a-talented-mind.mightybell.com).

The community is provided by A Talented Mind Clinic in Richmond, Virginia, that provides cognitive rehabilitation therapy to brain injury survivors and families. For more information, you may also email Mike Cerreto at [cerreto@atalentedmind.com](mailto:cerreto@atalentedmind.com).

### Survivor Stories Wanted!

Recovering from a brain injury can be very difficult. Sometimes, one of the most helpful and inspiring things is simply hearing from other survivors who have gone through recovery and faced the same challenges. Are you a survivor with a story you'd like to share? If so, then we'd like to hear it, and it might get into a future issue of TBI Today!

Submit to: [jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org](mailto:jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org)

or

TBI Today, VCU P.O. Box 980542  
Richmond, VA 23298-0542



### SKILL-BUILDING, SUPPORTIVE AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FOR COUPLES AFTER BRAIN INJURY PARTICIPANTS INVITED!

**Are you in a relationship? Have you or your partner had an acquired brain injury ?  
You May Qualify for an Ongoing Research Study!**

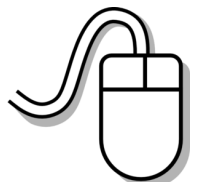
Virginia Commonwealth University researchers in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation are seeking adults with brain injuries to be part of a research study. We are evaluating the helpfulness of an outpatient rehabilitation program to help couples adjust to brain injury. Qualified volunteers will participate in five to six support and education sessions. Study volunteers will be given information on brain injury, local resources, skills development, and positive coping strategies. Volunteers will also be asked to complete several questionnaires. Participants must be at least 18 years old. There is no charge for services and volunteers are compensated for their time.

**If you are interested in participating,  
please call Jenny Marwitz at 804-828-3704  
or toll free at 866-296-6904 or email  
[jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org](mailto:jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org)**

### JUST FOR FUN KEY

1. Too Funny For Words (2 "funny" + 4 "words")
2. Broken Promise
3. See Eye To Eye (C + I + 2 "I")
4. One In A Million
5. Scrambled Eggs
6. Crossroads
7. Big Deal
8. Good Afternoon
9. Neon Lights ("Knee" on "Lights")

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Founded in 1983 by families and concerned professionals, the Brain Injury Association of Virginia is the only statewide non-profit organization in Virginia exclusively devoted to serving individuals with brain injury, their families, and those that care for and about them. Over 10,000 people find help from BIAV each year.



The Voice of Brain Injury: *Help, Hope & Healing*