

TBI TODAY

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



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Coping During COVID

by Katelyn Santrock and Kevin Murray

Society is presently facing an unsettling collective experience due to COVID-19, an infectious disease caused by a novel virus. The onset of COVID-19 has affected the world in many ways. Given the absence of a vaccine, advisories promote social distancing as a non-pharmaceutical method to prevent and reduce the spread of illness. Because individuals are encouraged to socially distance, public gatherings and nonessential outings are discouraged, businesses are closing, and individuals are losing jobs. Naturally, this period of uncertainty and instability stirs feelings of anxiety, nervousness, idleness, fear, and sadness. During this time of uncertainty, it is important to focus on reducing stress, protecting health and happiness, and retaining a sense of control. The following self-care techniques may be useful to promote mental, emotional, and physical health:

- Maintain a routine to provide structure
 - * Go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day
 - * Shower, brush your teeth, and get dressed
 - * Exercise daily (e.g., following guided exercise videos on YouTube or a fitness app)
 - * Prepare nourishing meals
- Create a calming environment
 - * Diffuse essential oils in relaxing scents that you prefer, such as lavender, cedar or citrus
 - * Open the window for fresh air
 - * Listen to music, particularly playlists that fit your mood
 - * Light candles
 - * Wrap up in a cuddly blanket and pillows
 - * Bathe with bath salts, oils or bath bombs
 - * Wear clothes that make you feel comfortable
 - * Drink warm, soothing beverages (e.g., hot herbal tea)
 - * Eat your favorite comfort food (in moderation)
- Take quiet time
 - * Go for walks in nature
 - * Check in with yourself (e.g., ask yourself "how do I feel in this moment?")
 - * Analyze how you feel and why you may be feeling that way
 - * Write daily journal entries that may include gratitude lists
 - * Meditate, stretch, and breathe mindfully
 - * Practice yoga by following online guided yoga sessions
- Engage in enjoyable activities or find a new hobby
 - * Play games and/or do puzzles
 - * Read digital or hardcopy books
 - * Craft (e.g., counted cross stitch or paint by numbers kits)
 - * Rent movies and watch shows on streaming services
 - * Try new recipes
- Remain grounded, engaged, and connected
 - * Check on family members and friends by texting, calling or FaceTiming



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- * Order takeout meals to support local businesses
 - * Pay attention to and love on your pet
 - * Grow a plant to watch something thrive from your effort and energy
6. Start or continue a journey of self-improvement
- * Replace a negative habit with a positive habit
 - * Monitor and limit time spent on your phone and social media
 - * Avoid online negative content while remaining in touch with relevant news

If you can, try to ease the pressure to be productive and take advantage of this downtime. Exercise self-compassion by realizing it is perfectly reasonable if you find yourself struggling during this crisis. The tendency to rely on old and familiar ways of coping should not be viewed as a failure. Ultimately, the goal is to take care of yourself during these unprecedented times. In the end, may you find that this time molded you in ways that allow you to better brave life's challenges.

Katelyn Santrock & Kevin Murray are psychometrists in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehab at VCU



Mark Your Calendar

Aphasia Support Group

- ◆ **When:** 2nd Thursday of the month, 6-7pm
- ◆ **Location:** Wells Coleman office building in Monument Corporate Centre office park, 5004 Monument Avenue, Richmond, 23230
- ◆ **Contact:** Susan Hapala at (804) 908-3261 or Jan Thomas at rva.aphasia@gmail.com

Stroke/Brain Injury Survivor & Caregiver Support Group

- ◆ **When:** 2nd Wednesday of the month, 2-3pm
- ◆ **Location:** Sheltering Arms Rehab Hospital, 8254 Atlee Rd, Mechanicsville, 23116 Conference Rm C OR 13700 St. Francis Blvd, Midlothian, 23114 4th Floor Conference Rm
- ◆ **Contact:** Kate Lim at (804) 764-5290 or klim@shelteringarms.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

If you have an upcoming event of interest to the Brain Injury community in Virginia, we would be glad to consider

PAIN AND OPIOID USE SURVEY

**Do you live in Virginia?
Have you had a traumatic brain injury (TBI)?
If yes, we want to hear from you!**

Virginia Commonwealth University researchers are seeking adults with traumatic brain injuries who live in Virginia to answer a 5-minute survey regarding pain and opioid use. All participants must be at least 18 years old.

The survey will not identify you in any way and all information will be kept confidential.

To answer the survey, please go to:
go.vcu.edu/tbi-and-pain

If you would like more information or if answering the survey questions over the telephone or by regular mail would be easier, please contact:

Laura Albert at (804) 828-2377
Laura.Albert@vcuhealth.org

This study is funded by the Virginia Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), award number A262-80504

Survivor Story: There's Power in the Storm by Janelle Charlemagne

Fear prevents us from moving forward, but we are not alone in our TBI recovery journey. I want to share how faith and perseverance aided me during a particularly challenging time in my life. Hopefully, my story offers a source of encouragement and inspiration to those struggling with unexpected life situations, and advocates for TBI survivors going through similar challenges.

In 2002, I sustained a severe TBI secondary to an assault, which left me in a coma for quite some time. Following intensive rehabilitation efforts, I was ultimately able to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science with a minor in Communications from the University of Louisville in Kentucky while working just across the state line in Indiana at an Amazon Fulfillment Center. The work at Amazon helped with the cost of my education, and I continued to work there after graduation, relocating to Indiana to be closer to the job.

Like many survivors of TBI, I was approved for Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefits to aid with living expenses. The state of Kentucky had sent me a notice of Revised Decision in March of 2015 stating that my disability was continuing, but in 2016 I received notice of an overpayment charge of more than \$12,500 due to a mix-up between separate SSA branches in Kentucky and Indiana regarding my benefit eligibility. Given my modest financial earnings, I was not able to afford these charges. Over the next year, I submitted several waivers and status update requests, to no avail. I was repeatedly informed that my case was pending. I relocated back to Virginia while continuing to call about my pending case. It was not until the beginning of 2018 that I was finally told that my appeal and waiver was denied and that my overpayment charges would go to a collection agency.

The year that followed was particularly tough. My TBI has left me with permanent scars, hardship, and physical and emotional pain. The progress I had made in my recovery seemed to be overshadowed by the sense of injustice I received from this situation. I felt like I was being tossed around from every angle. I sought legal advice. However, very few lawyers were available, and those that were wanted to charge more than I could afford. I spoke with one lawyer who told me my case was too complicated and I wouldn't win, so I decided to represent myself.

I also went to see my former Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) counselor, Helen B. Robertson about the matter. She was very supportive throughout the process. I am very thankful that she was part of my support system at this time.

In this time of need, I found strength through my faith in God, prayers, and supplication. While the obstacles seemed to continue to amass and my frustration grew, my determination did not waver. Although I felt repeatedly rejected, I continued to pray about my situation and fostered a belief in myself.



Two trash bags of documents shredded after the case was heard

In preparation for my upcoming hearing, I scoured through hundreds of pages of documents to build a case. This included over 15 years' worth of SSA disability statements, as well as records of college, rental, medical, and living expenses. During this stressful period, I maintained my faith and put myself on an "elimination diet," where I removed anger, bitterness, blame, guilt, stress, and worry. I had to stop making excuses about my predicament and dwelling on negative thoughts, adopt a positive mindset, and focus my energy on building a vision filled with courage, self-confidence, and self-control. I found

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DEAR PAT,

I am 44 years old and sustained a TBI in a motor vehicle accident nearly five years ago. I was fortunate to survive the accident, though my recovery has been challenging, to say the least. In the aftermath of my injury, I was terminated from my job as a construction supervisor. Most difficult of all, my wife and I divorced three years ago due to irreconcilable differences. We were married for 21 years and have a 19-year-old daughter, who currently lives out of state. Everyone could see I was struggling. My close friends continued inviting me out or over for dinner, but I no longer had the energy to see them. I felt myself begin to pull away until my friends stopped reaching out.

Following a series of short job stints, I was blessed to secure a job as a food prep at a local restaurant. While the pay does not compare to my prior construction position, I am very thankful to work alongside a group of amazing individuals who welcomed me into their circle. Their friendships have truly been a godsend, as their support has aided me in my battle with depression and loneliness.

Unfortunately, following the outbreak of COVID-19, my restaurant was forced to close its doors to the public and many, including myself, were placed on furlough. This time of social distancing has been incredibly difficult, occurring just as I was beginning to fall into a stride of establishing new meaningful friendships. Although I continue to maintain correspondence with my coworkers through phone calls and texts, I worry I may backslide into social withdrawal and isolation. In addition to working, I previously filled my time exercising at the gym and volunteering at my church, which offered a sense of purpose and connectedness. However, these activities have also been placed on pause in the midst of this pandemic.

Pat, what advice or recommendations can you offer to combat feelings of seclusion?

-Gerald

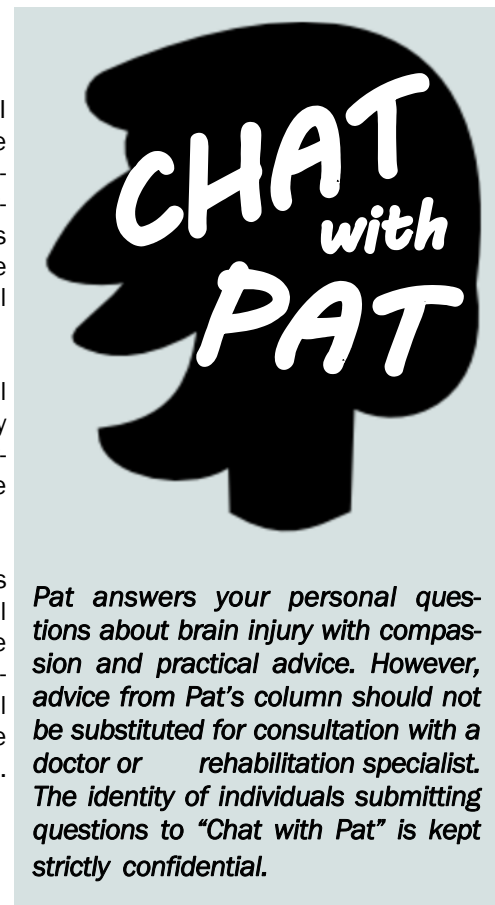
PAT'S RESPONSE:

Dear Gerald,

You are commended on your dedication to sustain your journey of self-improvement and growth during this time. It is important to continue connecting with friends and loved ones to preserve a network of support and avoid further lifestyle disruption amidst the uncertainty. It may seem contradictory to socialize while practicing social isolation; however, there are several ways to remain connected while safely social distancing.

Consider the following:

- * Try organizing weekly or biweekly online video calls. The ability to see each other can add an additional layer of connectedness.
- * Invite your friends to play online interactive games.
- * Many churches are now hosting virtual services. You may wish to explore this option as an alternative to your usual church sermon.
- * Take moments to check in with your daughter and other family members by texting or calling them. You may inspire them to return the favor.
- * Find a pen pal. Handwritten letters convey thoughtfulness and are tangible gifts of kindness you can keep.
- * Exchange gratitude lists with a buddy each day. Start by listing three things. You may find your lists will grow!
- * Form a book or movie club. Curate a list of books to read or movies to watch to later discuss with your friends.
- * Explore online TBI support group options. You may be introduced to like individuals in similar situations. You can be sources of support for one another.
- * Stay active by taking walks with neighbors or local friends, while maintaining appropriate physical distance. You could also plan an outdoor, socially distant picnic.
- * Finally, do not forget to connect with yourself. Take time to engage in activities you enjoy! Completing home projects would likely align closely with your skills and interests, while also fostering feelings of accomplishment and productivity.



Flower Word Search



S	O	O	X	B	S	Z	O	W	W
U	N	G	A	R	D	E	N	I	A
N	C	A	D	F	V	W	Q	D	O
F	T	K	P	A	L	I	L	Y	R
L	U	D	A	D	H	Y	X	C	C
O	L	A	R	T	R	L	F	X	H
W	I	I	O	U	R	A	I	Y	I
E	P	S	S	F	K	L	G	A	D
R	M	Y	E	G	W	O	F	O	R
C	A	R	N	A	T	I	O	N	N

JUST FOR FUN!

- SNAPDRAGON
- ROSE
- DAHLIA
- SUNFLOWER
- TULIP
- LILY
- CARNATION
- GARDENIA
- DAISY
- ORCHID



Frequently Asked Questions

THE INFORMATION PROVIDED IN THE FAQ IS INTENDED TO FAMILIARIZE THE PUBLIC WITH ISSUES RELATED TO TBI. NO INFORMATION PROVIDED HEREIN SHOULD BE CONSTRUED AS THERAPEUTIC ADVICE OR AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR CONSULTATION WITH A COMPETENT MEDICAL OR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL.

QUESTION:

Since sustaining a TBI two years ago, I have struggled with decreased motivation. I used to get confidence from my productivity, but now, even simple tasks require increased effort. What are ways to increase my motivation?

ANSWER:

Diminished motivation can occur due to injury to the area of the brain responsible for initiation, perseverance, and executive functioning. In severe cases, an individual may have trouble performing even simple routine tasks, such as bathing, dressing, and eating. Diminished initiative is also a common symptom of depression. Could depression be contributing to your experience? A period of depression is a reasonable reaction to unfavorable, unforeseen events. If you believe you may also be struggling with depression, consider establishing care with a psychologist who could help you develop effective coping strategies to mitigate your distress.

Here are some additional suggestions for ways to promote drive:

- Practice consistent proper sleep hygiene to ensure you will be energized. To receive adequate sleep, try waking up and going to bed at reliable times, avoiding daytime naps, eating dinner and exercising no later than two hours before bed, limiting technology use before sleeping, and minimizing consumption of sugar, alcohol, nicotine, and caffeine.
- Establish a daily routine to form habits. Keep the routine simple to decrease the likelihood of veering from your plans. Use tools, such as calendars and lists, to add additional structure. Check completed items off your list as you go. You will feel accomplished for making progress, and it will be clear what is left to be done.
- Take note whether or not your workspace is cluttered. A disorderly atmosphere can be overwhelming, acting as a hindrance to productivity. Prioritize maintaining an organized environment.
- Set simplistic, realistic goals. With successful completion of the simple goals, you can build towards taking on more challenging tasks. Approach larger tasks in a similar manner, creating smaller, more manageable steps for completing the bigger project.
- For optimal time management, create practical timelines and/or deadlines for task completion.
- Schedule frequent breaks to mitigate frustration and fatigue, so that you feel rejuvenated when initiating or resuming a task.
- Attempt to make mundane responsibilities more enjoyable. For example, if you plan to clean or cook, turn on your favorite music or podcast and let it play in the background. You could also take that time to phone a friend to chat while you work.
- Share your to-do list with a friend or family member who will keep you accountable.
- Give yourself choices. (e.g., “I have to wash the dishes and do laundry, so I’ll start with the laundry.” “I can take the trash out now or in one hour.”)
- Find ways to reward yourself for your accomplishments. You can reward yourself with preferred activities once a less desirable task is complete. For example, you can get take-out from your favorite restaurant after cooking your own meals at home three nights in a row.
- Most importantly, be kind to yourself on this journey. Criticizing yourself lowers self-esteem which impacts one’s confidence and ambition. Small steps add up to large changes.

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solace in reading proverbs and received comfort from little things, such as listening to Michael Jackson’s song “Keep the Faith” and watching Joe’s Apartment, when I felt as though I was falling apart.

On July 2, 2019, I stood in front of a judge, who would hear my case. After listening to my defense and reviewing the documentation of my case, she fully decided in my favor and decreed that I did not owe any overpayment dues!

During this tribulation, I maintained faith in God and myself. I came to see the success in my struggles, and from them, draw strength. I had to choose between faith and fear, and I chose faith. I continued to work toward getting my priorities together and hung on to the positive side of fear, or as I like to define: Face – Everything around me and – Always – Rise above all negative notions.

If I could offer the reader one lesson I learned from my journey, it would be this: life after TBI is an ongoing process, filled with many challenges. Continue to find new ways to break down barriers. Don’t give up and don’t give in. Always go the extra mile and avoid making negative assumptions about yourself or the future. Most importantly, keep faith, whether that be in yourself or a higher power.

Galatians 6:9 (NKJV) “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”

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



RESILIENCE AND ADJUSTMENT STUDY FOR ADULTS WITH TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY PARTICIPANTS INVITED!

Have you had a traumatic brain injury (TBI)? You May Qualify for an Ongoing Research Study!

Virginia Commonwealth University researchers in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation are seeking adults with traumatic brain injuries to be part of a research study. We are evaluating the helpfulness of an outpatient rehabilitation program to help people adjust to having a brain injury. Qualified volunteers will participate in seven rehabilitation and education sessions and possibly three additional 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

N	N	O	I	T	A	N	R	A	C
R	O	F	O	W	G	E	Y	M	R
D	A	G	L	K	F	S	S	P	E
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H	X	F	L	R	T	R	A	L	O
C	C	X	Y	H	D	A	D	U	L
R	Y	L	L	A	F	K	T	F	F
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KEY

VCU, PM&R

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY MODEL SYSTEM

P.O. BOX 980542

RICHMOND, VA 23298-0542

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Go to tbims.vcu.edu to access back issues!



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.

BIAV is a chartered state affiliate of the Brain Injury Association of America and exists to be the voice of brain injury through help, hope and healing for Virginians with brain injury and their families. We educate human service professionals and the community on the risks and impact of brain injury and advocate for improved medical and community-based services. Many of our staff members are Certified Brain Injury Specialists (CBIS Certified).

To find out more information about BIAV, contact us at 1-800-444-6443 or 804-355-5748. Or visit our website at www.biav.net.



The Voice of Brain Injury: Help, Hope & Healing