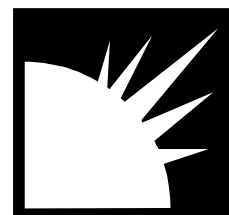


# TBI TODAY

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



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## Effective Stress Management

adapted from Help You Need Guide #3

by Jeff Kreutzer & Laura Taylor

### Brain Injury and Stress

For many survivors, brain injury brings on a period of intense stress. Injury brings on dramatic life changes, worries about recovery, work or school problems, and financial hardships. Many survivors worry that life will never be normal again. Understanding stress is a first step toward better coping,

### What is Stress?

The word stress is used often and in many different ways. **Psychologists define stress as an emotional and physical response to a frightening or unpleasant situation.** Stress is worse when you feel pressured to solve a problem immediately, but don't see any solution. Feeling your muscles tighten and your heart beat faster, or feeling like you have little control over your emotions are sure signs of stress.

### How is Stress Harmful?

Stress can make brain injury problems worse, slow recovery, and cause additional problems including:

- \* Headaches, heart and digestion problems
- \* Hopelessness and depression
- \* Sleep troubles
- \* Low energy and motivation
- \* Decreased productivity
- \* Reduced life satisfaction and self-esteem
- \* Irritability, short temper, impatience, and withdrawal from others
- \* Anxiety and nervousness
- \* Relationship problems

### How Can You Cope with Stress Effectively?

- ◆ Avoid putting yourself down or pushing yourself too hard.
- ◆ Realize that taking on too much too soon may lead to frustration and failure.
- ◆ Set reasonable goals and expectations for yourself.
- ◆ Make a "to-do" list, rank order the items by priority, start with #1, and work down the list.
- ◆ Work on only 1 or 2 problems at a time.
- ◆ Talk to other survivors about how they cope successfully.
- ◆ Seek support and help from trusted friends and family members.
- ◆ Think positive thoughts and keep a good sense of humor.
- ◆ Keep up a healthy lifestyle by exercising, eating right, and avoiding caffeine, alcohol, drugs and tobacco.
- ◆ Breathe slowly and deeply.
- ◆ Do something enjoyable... listen to soothing music, take a long bath, go for a walk, read a book.
- ◆ Don't forget to take breaks, everyone needs them.
- ◆ Close your eyes and imagine yourself in a pleasant situation
- ◆ Have a back up plan in case your first plan does not work.
- ◆ Talk to your doctor about worrisome symptoms to help sort out their cause and possible need for treatment.

*Realize that stress is a normal part of life. Learn to be patient with yourself and recognize that everyone struggles and feel stress at times.*

This cover article has been adapted from The Help You Need Guide #3: Effective Stress Management. For the full brochure please visit our website [tbi.vcu.edu](http://tbi.vcu.edu)



# Mark Your Calendar

## 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

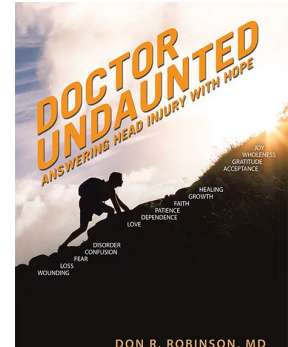
## Community Living Connection (CLiC) Care Online Support Group for Caregivers and Survivors

- ♦ **When:** 2nd Tuesday of the month, 7-8:30 pm, Outings planned for the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays
- ♦ **Location:** Online (WebEx)
- ♦ **Contact:** Stacey Nichols at (540) 344-1200 or stacey@bisswva.org

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) 828-2377 or email [laura.albert@vcuhealth.org](mailto:laura.albert@vcuhealth.org).

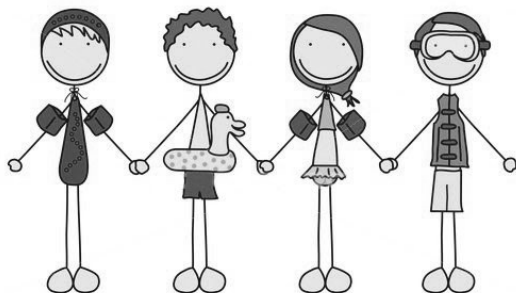
## TBI Survivor Book Announcement

*Doctor Undaunted: Answering Head Injury with Hope* by Dr. Don R. Robinson



In his new book, *Doctor Undaunted: Answering Head Injury with Hope*, Dr. Don R. Robinson engages his readers in his autobiographical experience with traumatic brain injury (TBI) while simultaneously providing a medical professional's perspective on the recovery journey. With gentle encouragement spoken from an authoritative standpoint of someone who has walked both the paths of survivor and clinician, Dr. Robinson sympathetically explains to his readers what to expect during medical visits, suggests how to navigate interactions with medical providers, and emphasizes honest reporting of symptoms, with the intention that the best individualized care and treatment plan can be implemented. His story is one of hope, resilience and expert knowledge interwoven into a handbook that is an especially useful tool for patients and family members to rely on and refer to when navigating the challenges and issues that impact recovery. Dr. Robinson poignantly writes, "So, what was it really like? The tough part was admitting to myself that my world was changed and that it was going to persist" (p. 107, *Doctor Undaunted*). His accessible, relatable approach aims to make the road to recovery a little less daunting, and his testament is an olive branch he hopes to extend to others on the path to recovery.

To learn more about the author, sign up for his mailing list, read an excerpt from the book, or obtain a copy of *Doctor Undaunted: Answering Head Injury with Hope*, visit [doctorundaunted.com](http://doctorundaunted.com). You can find the book available for purchase on the Kindle Store, Barnes & Noble, Google Play Books, or Amazon.



Are you a fan of *Cosmos*? Do you like Science Fiction and Philosophy? You might be interested in one survivor's autobiographical musings.

Below is an excerpt from Jay Crandall's *I Am A Particularly Lucky Martian*

My good luck started early - I exist. My existence is possible because the finely tuned universe that I call home has just the right constants to allow for life. This can be explained by the magic of the anthropic principle at work within a multiverse, and the universe is made of tiny bubbles containing mini-universes, scientists say. Our existence certainly makes a strong case that it's turtles all the way down. In that vast array of universes, ours was one where gravity was exactly as powerful as it needs to be, with a perfect ratio of the strong force and the electromagnetic force. In the universe that I call home, Earth has a perfect atmosphere, is the right distance from the sun, which is of the right intensity, and we have oceans of water, all of it from comets and asteroids. I think that Fermi's paradox isn't really a paradox at all - the Drake equation normally has an incredibly low  $f_i$ , and points to our universe having many empty or dinosaur equivalent-populated worlds, in a multiverse of many universes with varying universal constants, most of which unable to produce life.

You're a lucky Martian too, and so are all the living things around you.

To read more you can visit keep up with Jay at:

- \* [tinyurl.com/luckymartiantimeline](http://tinyurl.com/luckymartiantimeline).
- \* the Google Doc it's based on at [tinyurl.com/particularlyluckymartian](http://tinyurl.com/particularlyluckymartian),
- \* and a podcast at [tinyurl.com/iamaparticularlyluckymartian](http://tinyurl.com/iamaparticularlyluckymartian).



## DEAR PAT,

I was in a terrible bike accident almost two years ago. It was early morning when I took off for my usual ride to start my day. No one was up yet in my house. I like the peace and quiet of being by myself on the road. However, I cannot tell you what happened after I left the house. Actually, I don't even know if I can remember what happened before except that it is what I did every morning during the work week. All I know is that I woke up in the hospital.

I was told that it's a miracle that I survived the crash. I was hit by a driver who didn't look before he turned. I flipped off my bike and landed in the middle of the road. Thankfully, I wore my helmet or I might not be here to tell my story. I had broken my right arm, had lots of bruises all over my body and a brain injury.

I was taken to the hospital by an ambulance and in a coma for a week. My wife said that they weren't even sure if I was going to come out of it. When I did, I did really well and was stable enough to be transferred to the rehab unit a few days later. I don't remember much about being in the hospital, except that everyone was really nice to me and I was tired. I did a lot of different therapies that were hard. I had to really push myself to make progress so I could go home.

In the past two years I worked really hard to get my life back to where it was. It's not easy. And I've been told that it may never be the same, but I'm not ready to accept that. I know I'm better than I was right after leaving the hospital. I have reached a lot of the goals I set for myself like riding again. I am very grateful for my wife and children because they have been there for me every step of the way.

The thing that bothers me the most these days is not having any friends. My friends no longer call or come to visit. I don't know if I pushed them away or what. I know I often don't feel like doing anything so I don't show up or cancel last minute. I used to be very social, going out with my friends or they would come over to the house. Now I stay home on weekends, watching television with my kids. I do want my friends back, but there are a lot of days where I just want to hide in my room and be by myself. Please help me, I'm torn between wanting to be social and wanting to be left alone.

## PAT'S RESPONSE:

Many changes occur after a brain injury, including relationships. Survivors often lose friends or have difficulty maintaining friendships. Many survivors feel like no one understands them or that they cannot relate to others. In addition, social situations could be overwhelming; they may have a hard time following conversations or listening to multiple people talk at the same time, be sensitive to loud noise, or become easily fatigued. Many survivors also feel self-conscious after their injuries because they are concerned about being different than others. They are worried about what others may think of them. Sometimes, it just seems easier to be alone than to deal with the challenges. Survivors frequently find comfort in being home and feel safe there.

However, having positive relationships can help with your recovery. It is important to have social interactions. This is something we all learned in the past year as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; social isolation can cause mental health issues. We need engagement with others to keep up positive psychological health. For example, when faced with new challenges, it is important to be able to talk about thoughts and feelings with others. Friends can help sort out new and difficult problems. They may even be able to help figure out solutions to problems. Friends can also give you feedback about how you are doing. They can provide encouragements that would help you to do things for yourself. Talking with a close friend is a great way to cope with and come to accept injury-related changes. You will feel less isolated and alone by having positive relationships in your life.

The next step for you is to build and maintain relationships, which can be hard. Here are some ideas for being kind to others:

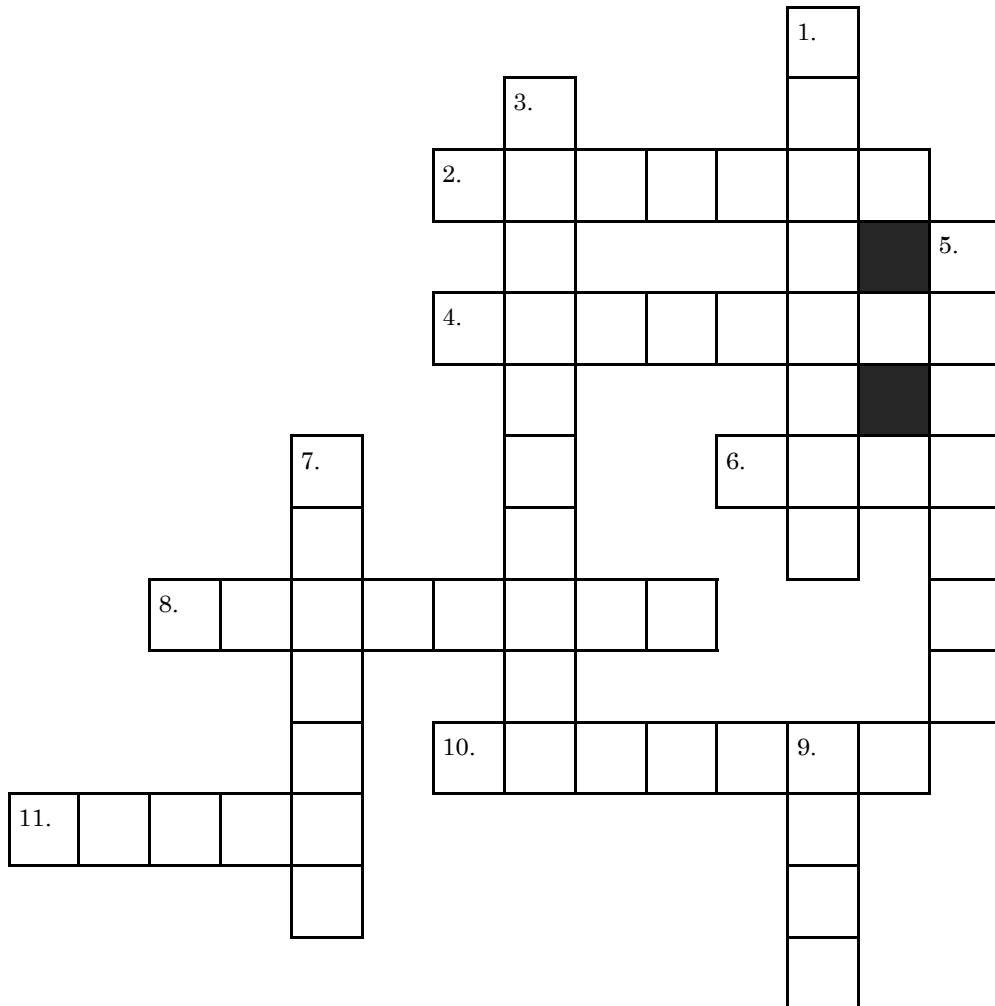
- ✓ Write, call, email, or text your friends, even if you are just saying "hi."
- ✓ Be polite, kind, and considerate. Show that you care about others.
- ✓ Think about how what you do and say might affect others.
- ✓ Be a patient listener.
- ✓ Stop and think before you speak.
- ✓ Tell someone who helps you how much you appreciate them.
- ✓ Think of others at least as much as you think about yourself.
- ✓ Don't be shy about complimenting others. Think about what you like about other people and tell them.

Lastly, getting involved in a local support group would help you to feel less alone and overwhelmed. You will have the opportunity to meet others who may be struggling with the same challenges. If you wish to get involved with your local support group to share your experience, the Brain Injury Association of America has a list of support groups you and your family may attend. To contact BIAA, you may call their family helpline (1-800-444-6443) or send them an email at [familyhelpline@biausa.org](mailto:familyhelpline@biausa.org). The website for BIAA ([www.biausa.org](http://www.biausa.org)) provides links to state chapters and additional brain injury resources. You may also write BIAA for more information at 1608 Spring Hill Road, Suite 110, Vienna, VA 22182.



*Pat answers your personal questions about brain injury with compassion and practical advice. However, advice from Pat's column should not be substituted for consultation with a doctor or rehabilitation specialist. The identity of individuals submitting questions to "Chat with Pat" is kept strictly confidential.*

# STRESS RELIEF CROSSWORD



JUST FOR FUN

## DOWN

1. People go on these to get a break from their everyday life.
3. Time off from work and stress, doing nothing but enjoying yourself and calming down
5. These are the people in our life that help us cope with the stressful times because they know us well and listen.
7. What it's called when people talk to a mental health professional.
9. To share and express your thoughts and feelings to a person who will listen

## ACROSS

2. What can happen if your body gets run down from stress and lack of sleep.
4. This is done out loud, when something is funny and can make you feel better.
6. To manage your stress through different ways that make you feel better.
8. Whether done at a park, a gym or at home, this activity relieves stress and is good for you.
10. Feelings of high stress, panic, worry. Sometimes including physiological (bodily) symptoms.
11. You should get about 8 hours each day to maintain health and happiness.

## WORD BANK:

TALK

LAUGHTER

ANXIETY

SLEEP

GET SICK

RELAXATION

COPE

VACATION

FRIENDS

EXERCISE

THERAPY



# 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 my concussion, I have a hard time handling stress well. I get easily overwhelmed by problems and I just shut down. I know it's not possible to get rid of stress. What can I do to deal with it better?

## ANSWER:

It's difficult to manage stress well after sustaining a concussion. Survivors often feel overwhelmed dealing with injury-related challenges and changes. You have more things on your plate than you used to. Like you said, stress is a normal part of life, so it is important to learn to be patient with yourself during this process.

To help you understand how much stress you are facing, consider taking our **13-item stress test**.

*Circle T for True or F for False for each item below*

1. I have a lot to do.
2. I have more to do than I can handle.
3. I'm not being productive.
4. I'm trying really hard, but nothing is getting done.
5. My symptoms are getting worse.
6. I can't afford to take breaks or time off.
7. I'm pushing myself too hard.
8. I don't sleep very well.
9. Too many people are telling me what to do.
10. I am not treating people the way I want to be treated.
11. I feel totally exhausted.
12. Nobody is happy with what I do.
13. I can't stand living like this.

T	F
T	F
T	F
T	F
T	F
T	F
T	F
T	F
T	F
T	F
T	F
T	F
T	F



**SCORING:** The more true responses you circle, the greater stress and pressure you are feeling. For tips for coping with stress effectively, see our cover article on page 1 (adapted from *Help You Need Guide #3* from the National Resource Center for Traumatic Brain Injury, available for purchase on our website: [tbi.vcu.edu](http://tbi.vcu.edu)).



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

**Send them to:**

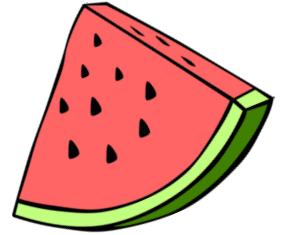
**"ASK PAT" OR "FAQ"**

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

**or e-mail: [laura.albert@vcuhealth.org](mailto:laura.albert@vcuhealth.org)**



# SUMMER



## 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: [laura.albert@vcuhealth.org](mailto:laura.albert@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!

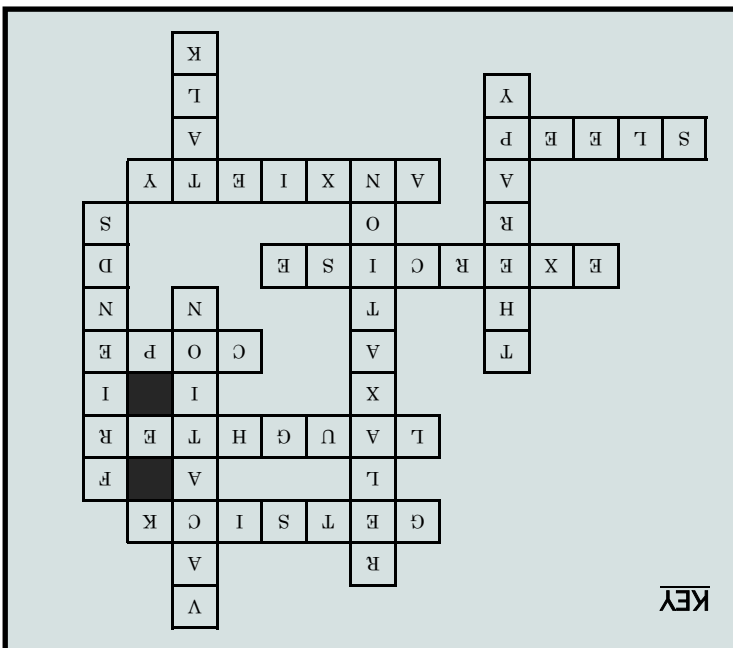
**Have you had a traumatic brain injury (TBI)?  
You May Qualify for an Ongoing Research  
Study!**

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 Karren Brooke at**

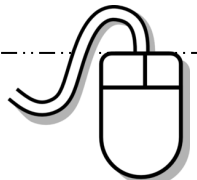
**804-828-3705**

**or toll free at 866-296-6904 or email  
[karen.brooke@vcuhealth.org](mailto:karen.brooke@vcuhealth.org)**



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**VCU, PM&R**

**TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY MODEL SYSTEM**

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**RICHMOND, VA 23298-0542**

**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

Go to [tbims.vcu.edu](http://tbims.vcu.edu) to access back issues!



**1-800-444-6443**

**biav.net | info@biav.net**



## **We're here for what comes next.**

The human brain is extremely complex. So, it can be difficult to know where to begin when it comes to navigating life after brain injury.

### **That's where we come in.**



We provide free and confidential resources and support to people with brain injuries, caregivers, and health and human service professionals.



We work to raise awareness, advocate at the federal, state, and local levels, and offer community connection through membership.



We offer professionals guidance for their patients and continuing education through conferences, webinars, and workshops.