

TBI TODAY

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



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DISCLAIMER:

The views expressed in survivor stories are of the author and reflect the author's experience. These do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of VCU or its researchers.

Driving after Traumatic Brain Injury

by Dr. Kelli Gary, TBIMS Dissemination Coordinator



When a person experiences a brain injury, it may impair many functional areas of life and independent living. Driving is one functional area that represents independence and requires sharp skills to perform safely. As highlighted in the Model System Knowledge Translation Center's TBI factsheet on driving after TBI, a brain injury can impair various skills making driving very

dangerous. These impairments highlight the importance of monitoring a person with brain injury's return to driving. Skills important for good driving include cognitive, motor, perceptual and emotional skills.

Cognitive Skills

Memory, concentration, safety awareness and judgement, and reaction time are cognitive skills necessary for safe driving. You need them for directions, remember driving rules, drive long distances, judge unsafe situations and avoid them if they occur while driving.

Motor Skills

Endurance, hand and foot movements are helpful for keeping drivers safe. You need to safely steer or control mechanisms that move that car (e.g., ignition, gas pedal, brakes).

Perceptual Skills

Problems with vision, coordination, and judging distances can bring drivers one step closer to crashing the car or having moving violations.

Emotional Skills

Issues with emotions such as anger, frustration, and sadness can cause drivers to drive irrationally and incautiously.

Some rehabilitation professionals are specifically trained and certified to restore skills or provide adaptive equipment to compensate for impaired driving. For more information about the evaluation and rehabilitation of driving after brain injury or if you are thinking about driving again, call (804) 764-1000 and ask Sheltering Arms Driver Readiness Program or visit: <https://www.shelteringarms.com/rehablog/are-you-ready-to-drive-again/>

Model System Knowledge Translation Center (2010). *Driving after traumatic brain injury* [Factsheet]. TBI Model Systems, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education, grant no H133A060070.



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

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

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 jennifercc@communitybraininjury.org

Richmond Area Bicycle Association Annual Heart of Virginia Bike Festival Ride

- ◆ **When:** September 17th, 2022
- ◆ **Location:** Hanover County Administration Building, 7516 County Complex Road, Hanover VA 23069
- ◆ **Register:** <http://www.heartofvabikefestival.org/> Proceeds from the event benefit BIAV and the RA-BA Foundation's Bikes for Kids program.

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

Survivor Story:

A New View of Change

by Janelle Charlemagne

Even after 20 years, my journey of recovery is not over. I continue to see myself recover and make progress every day. Through this journey I have faced new challenges, made self-improvements and learned that we are not alone in our TBI recovery. I've also learned that no matter how challenging life may get, tough times never last, but tough people do.

Part of being tough is being brave in the face of challenges. Challenges were brought on during my recovery from my traumatic brain injury, as well as challenges brought on by COVID-19 to my life and the lives of others. During that time, I tried to remember to avoid making negative assumptions about the future, and set positive expectations and reasonable goals for myself. To do this I set boundaries and keep an open mind to new experiences.

I make achievable goals by breaking down large goals into smaller steps. Making sure to acknowledge my accomplishments along the way, give myself breaks, and always ask for help when I need it. I also turn to God for help in developing my plans. Prayer can help me practice positive thinking and my faith has helped me through the challenges I face and pushes me to new heights. Thinking about the future helps me see the best routes to get to where I want to be. I often remind myself to look where I could be, instead of looking at where I am.

By looking and moving forward I reveal that setbacks are temporary. This was especially true when I found myself working a part time job that had me frustrated, challenged my work life balance, personal flexibility, and was not allowing me to grow in the company. I realized working part-time at FedEx Express was a stepping stone for more.

I know finding the right balance can be challenging and I tried to remember that we are

each individuals on our own journey but I knew it was time for me to make my move. So, I decided to keep an open mind to new experiences and not doubt myself. Every time we doubt ourselves, we have to remember “can’t never could.” I made a change and took a different path within the company and applied for a full-time position as a Senior Service Agent at FedEx Express. The company goes by seniority; however, I still applied for the position. I went to check my email and there it was – an offer letter for the position! I accepted the job that same night. With this new promotion I was able to get the benefits that come with a full-time position and I love the steady schedule of working Monday to Friday with weekends off.

This new role at work has given me the opportunity to grow with the company and learn more. I now have a more balanced life outside of work. I also have more time to focus on my mental health and de-stress. It comes with a great sense of relief.

This opportunity has reminded me that no matter how difficult an individual path may be, we all can still overcome trauma and hardship. I used my mindset for more: more flexibility, more positive expectations, and more willingness to adjust to new opportunities to positively impact my journey. I accepted change, believed in myself and never gave up from trying.

Hard times happen to everyone. As our lives change in recovery, we find new ways to overcome obstacles and work towards gaining financial independence and on the way we learn new skills. There are new levels of life for us all. Life is unpredictable but we all have to keep moving forward. Life is what you make of it. We all need to have a mindset for more.

Tools & Tips for Successful Seasonal Changes

By Laura Boylan

After a brain injury, adjusting to new schedules and activities can be more difficult than they were before. The end of summer and transitioning to fall sometimes means having to adjust changes in your daily routine and may even change the amount of social interaction with family and friends. By giving yourself time to think through and prepare for changes you enable yourself to enjoy each new moment and make the most of your new schedule.

Here are a few ideas to keep in mind when adjusting to change for you and your family:

- ✧ Get plenty of rest during times of adjustment.
- ✧ Use clear communication of your expectations for upcoming changes to schedules and social interaction. Ask questions as they come up and discuss any thoughts or feelings you may have about these changes.
- ✧ Utilize memory aids such as calendar reminders on your phone or hang a calendar at eye level in your home to help you get used to your new schedule.
- ✧ Practice relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, taking quiet time, or writing in a journal each day.
- ✧ Break down new activities and schedules into smaller steps to help improve understanding of the tasks and maximize your success.
- ✧ As your schedule changes it is helpful to maintain a daily routine. Try to incorporate some things you currently enjoy into your new schedule.

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DEAR PAT,

I was in a pretty bad car accident almost a year ago. My husband and family thought I was going to die in the hospital. I was in a coma for two weeks! Then when I woke up, the doctors said I would never be the same. Of course I don't remember the accident or what happened to me afterwards. My hospital stay was a big blur.

With many hours of rehabilitation along with the support of my family and friends, I learned to read, write, walk, and talk again. My therapists would discharge me when I reached all my goals. But, I continued to do my exercises at home. I could tell I was getting stronger every day. Everyone has been surprised by my recovery.

So, I am grateful for having survived the accident and getting better each day, but I'm ready for more. My frustration now is getting bored being around the house! I'm not the type to sit around doing nothing. I was always working. If I'm not at work, then I'm working on projects around the house. Well, frankly, I'm running out of projects. I need to get back to work. I think I'm driving my husband crazy too.

How do I convince my doctors to let me go back to work? They don't think I'm ready to go back but they didn't think I could do a lot of things that I'm doing now. I have a pretty easy job at the office. I answer people's questions over the phone. A great deal of time is spent on the computer, researching products, and interacting with customers. I've been with this company for over 10 years, I can do my job in my sleep. Any advice you have would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Rachel

PAT'S RESPONSE:

Dear Rachel,

Congratulations on your accomplishments! It sounds like you have overcome several difficult challenges. It is difficult for doctor's to predict a precise recovery course for everyone. We know no two brain injuries are the same. Doctors are often happy when they are wrong.

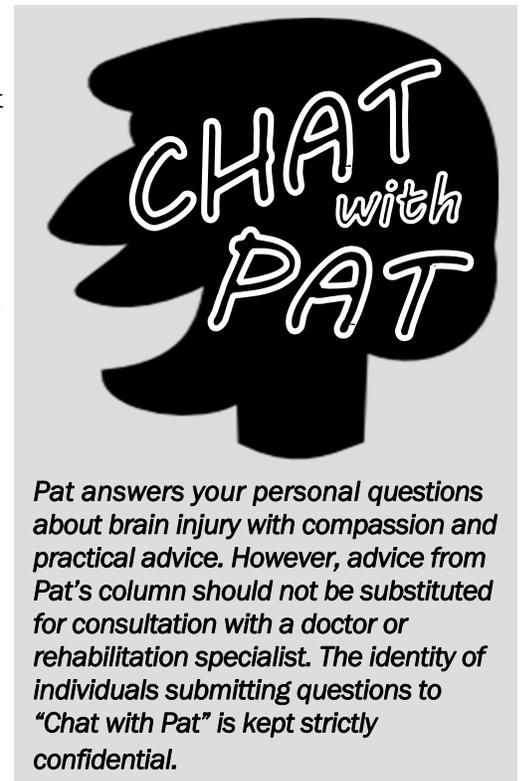
This past year probably felt like forever when you have been trying to get better and return to work. You're probably tired of being "sick." However, the majority of recovery typically occurs between the first 6-12 months, though improvements may continue to happen, albeit at a slower pace. Feelings of frustration are common because people want to get back to their "normal" life.

Returning to back to work prematurely will place you at risk for failure. Besides physical limitations, cognitive challenges are barriers to carrying out job responsibilities. People are often unaware of the cognitive changes because they have been focused on the physical aspect of rehabilitation. Like you, most survivors are trying to regain their independence by learning to walk and function efficiently around the house. They have not been challenged to perform because others, including caregivers and family members, often keep the survivors from doing too much.

To determine readiness for return to work, a comprehensive neuropsychological evaluation is recommended. A neuropsychological evaluation assesses for cognitive changes, including attention/concentration, learning and memory, motor abilities, visual skills, and reasoning. Consult with your treating physician regarding a referral.

In addition to undergoing a neuropsychological evaluation, it is important to maintain an open communication with your employer. Keeping them informed of your health and return to work status will allow them to be prepared for your return. Once your treating physician releases you, a gradual return to work is recommended (i.e. working part-time versus full-time hours). Fatigue often lingers as a residual effect of brain injury. Slowly increasing your responsibilities and work hours will increase your chance of success. Seeking feedback from your supervisor will also be a key to maintaining a positive impression.

Good Luck!



Heat Sensitivity Symptoms

The hypothalamus is a part of the brain that is in charge of a number of bodily functions, including balancing body fluids and controlling the release of hormones that play a part in temperature regulation. If the hypothalamus becomes damaged after a brain injury, the body may have trouble regulating its temperature.

Managing heat sensitivity is important to avoid additional complications. Some tips to managing heat sensitivity include staying hydrated, planning trips according to the heat index throughout the day (avoid being outside between 11 AM- 3 PM on hot days), dressing in cool clothing with breathable fabrics, keep your environment stable, and take care of your skin.

Below are some of the most common symptoms of heat sensitivity, see if you can find them all:

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

MOOD SWINGS

VISION ISSUES

BALANCE PROBLEMS

WEAKNESS

EXCESSIVE SWEATING

FATIGUE

NAUSEA

NOT ENOUGH SWEAT

CONFUSION



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 brain injury, I have trouble sleeping at night— even though I am exhausted! I just can't seem to turn off my thoughts! I'm just lying there tossing and turning, Is there anything I can do without taking medication?

ANSWER:

Sleep problems are common following a brain injury. Here are some things you can try:

- ✧ Set a regular sleep schedule: go to bed at the same time every night and set an alarm to wake up at the same time every morning.
- ✧ Avoid watching television, eating, or reading in bed.
- ✧ Create a pre-sleep routine (30 minutes) that relaxes your body and prepares it to go to sleep. For example, take a bath, drink hot tea, brush your teeth, and then listen to soft music or practice relaxation skills for 10 minutes.
- ✧ Create a restful atmosphere in the bedroom that is free of distraction, noise, bright light, and electronic devices.
- ✧ If you don't fall asleep in 20 minutes, do not stay in bed. Get up and do something until you feel drowsy. Return to bed only when you are ready to sleep so you associate bed with sleeping.
- ✧ Try to exercise regularly, but avoid strenuous exercise 3-5 hours before bedtime.
- ✧ Avoid consuming caffeine and alcohol, particularly in the late afternoon.



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



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

or

TBI Today, VCU P.O. Box 980542

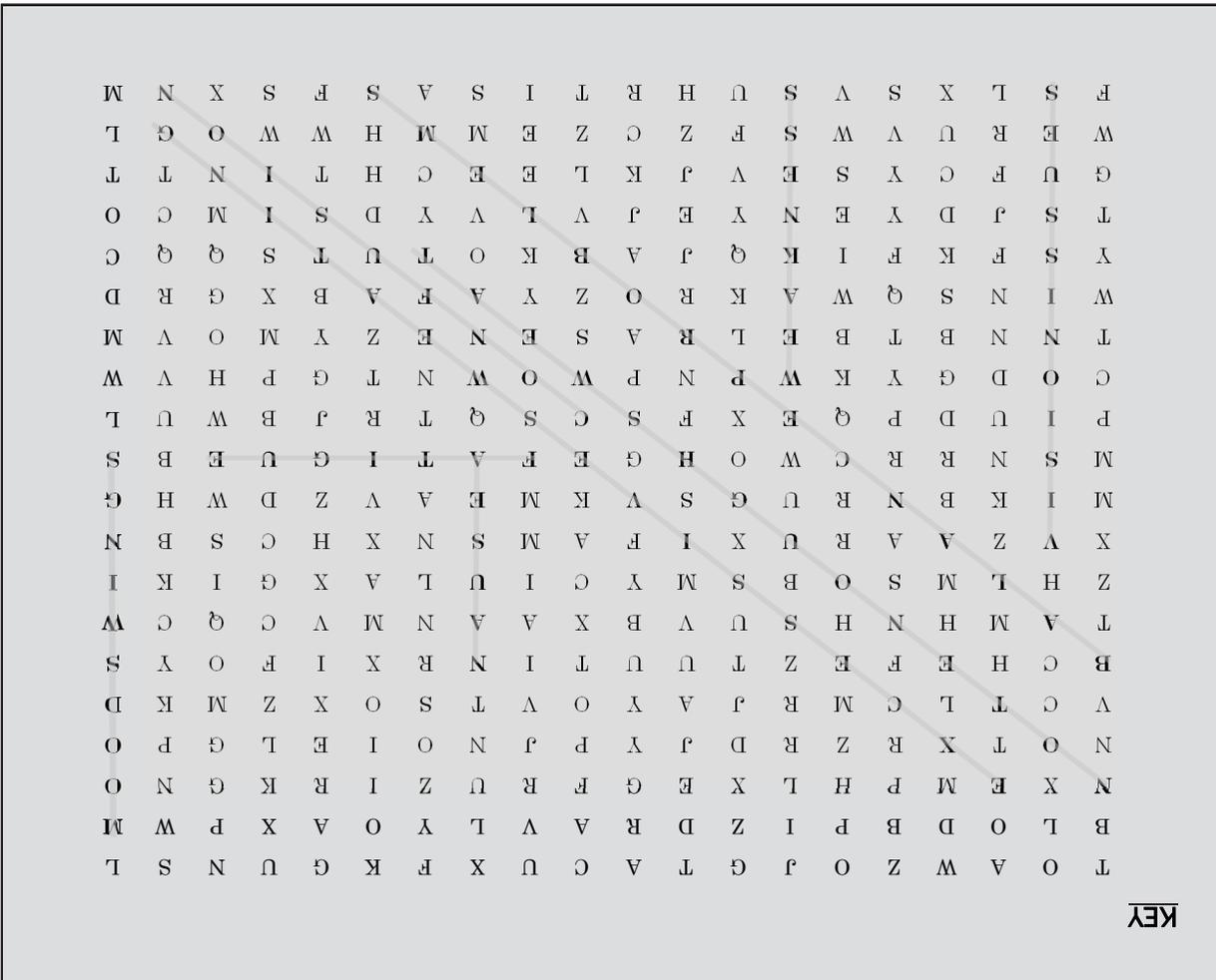
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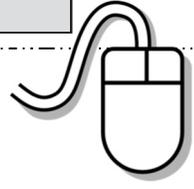
- ✧ If it has been a while since you saw friends or family, remember to take breaks as needed. Finding a quiet area where you feel safe is important when adjusting to new situations or environments.
- ✧ Practice patience. Give patience to yourself in these new situations and stay patient with others as they navigate new activities and daily schedules.
- ✧ Prioritize your needs before making plans. Double check that you do not have an appointment or other commitments before accepting an invitation to participate in an activity or visit friends and family
- ✧ Make lists of things you need to get done. If you will be out for the day, make a list of what you will need to bring to feel prepared. Ask a friend or family member to double check that you have everything you will need on your list before you leave for the day.

A new season can bring new difficulties and changes but with the right tools and resources you and your family’s scheduled can be filled with successful and fun activities throughout the year. Remember to stay safe and plan ahead!



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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.