

Returning home after an Acquired Brain Injury

The move from hospital to home for a person with a brain injury can be a stressful time for them and for you. You'll need to adjust to a drop in the level of support that had been available in hospital. Also, depending on the nature of their brain injury, the injured person may be less able to cope with the stress caused by the change.

Preparing for the Discharge home

Talking with the Social Work and nursing teams in the hospital can help you in planning the move home. Try to get as much information as possible about sources of help and support in the community. These include HSE local health services and community organisations, follow up appointments from the hospital, your GP, and other people that can help.

Remember that many people with a brain injury may need further assistance later from the hospital, so check how you can get this, before the person leaves hospital.

At Home

Structure and routine are essential for a person with brain injury. You, your family and friends, can work together to create a daily routine that will help the person with the injury to settle back in to daily life with as little stress and worry as possible.

For Family Members

There are many things that you can do to make the process of adjusting after a brain injury as easy as possible for your injured family member.

Tips that may help:

- Try to keep a regular routine.
- Write down daily activities and keep a daily personal planner with "To Do" lists.
- Post a calendar in an obvious place such as the fridge, for appointments and activities.
- Tell your family member if there's going to be a change in their routine.

Communicating and staying calm

If you can talk clearly and calmly with your brain injured family member, this should help during this time of readjustment for everyone.

- Establish eye contact and then talk once you have their attention.
- Turn off the TV, radio or washing machine if they are distracting, or upsetting the person.
- If you have something important to talk about, pick a time when the person with the brain injury is relaxed and not tired.
- Write any instructions or plans clearly in large and neat writing.
- You may need to say important things a couple of times, or write them down in the person can't remember.
- If the person needs it, write up step-by-step instructions for activities such as cleaning, using the washing machine, operating the remote, and so on.

Guidelines to help you cope

- Try to be patient and tolerant, especially with yourself.
- Don't try to cope alone. Ask family members, friends, or neighbours, to help in practical ways.
- Recognise what you can control, and what you can't.
- Try to be flexible and change something if it's not working for you, or your family member.
- Phone Headway if you need to talk, or to find out where to get more assistance.

For the person with the brain injury

Tips for reducing stress and anxiety include:

- Get enough sleep and rest.
- Eat healthy food regularly during the day.
- Use relaxation and stress reduction techniques.
- Cut out, or cut down on, alcohol and cigarettes.
- Take regular gentle exercise, if you can.
- Ensure you take your medication correctly.

Sleeping and eating meals at set times each day can help build a routine for you and your family.

This can help to ease stress as well.

To help you remember what you have planned for the day, write notes in a daily planner or get a diary. You can also put reminders in your phone.

Get into the habit of checking your plans every day or the night before.

Helpful tips include:

- Using a note pad by the phone.
- Write a "To Do" list on a white notice board and tick things off as you get them done.
- Set up a place in your house where you always put keys, appointment letters, and so on.
- Put labels or, colour codes, on cupboards to point out where things are kept.

Set Yourself Some Goals

If you set goals for yourself, it can help keep you motivated and focused. It may also help you to overcome negativity and to feel more in control.

It is important to identify your strengths, and weaknesses, and to set realistic goals. The best way to help you reach your goals is to make a plan with:

- What your goal is.
- The steps you need to take to reach it.
- When you want to reach it.
- Things that might stop you.
- How to overcome these.
- What reaching your goal will mean to you.