

How to help yourself recover following Neurosurgery or brain injury

It can take some time to recover from brain surgery – this is normal. This brochure will give you some ideas on what you can expect and how you can manage the effects from surgery or brain injury.

Headaches

You can continue to experience headaches after neurosurgery. These steps may help to reduce the pain:

- Drink plenty of water
- Take paracetamol 6 hourly
- Reduce stimulation by avoiding the television, or electronic devices
- Have regular rest in a dark room

Sleeping

Problems sleeping at night (Insomnia) affect 20 percent of the population, so you are not alone. Poor sleep can lead to reduced energy levels, irritability, poor concentration and emotional changes such as anxiety or a depressed mood.

To help you sleep, try some of the strategies below;

- Wear ear plugs to block out noise.
- Try a warm drink before bed such as milk.
- Avoid drinks containing caffeine (such as coffee, tea, energy or fizzy drinks) after lunch as caffeine can take up to 9 hours to leave your body.
- Avoid alcohol and recreational drugs.
- Avoid electronic devices before bed.
- Avoid watching the clock at night as this may increase the stress of not sleeping.
- If you can't sleep, read a book.
- Go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time every day even if you have slept less.

- Sometimes sleeping in the day (napping) is a good way to manage tiredness and irritability. Issues such as unsteadiness and aphasia become worse when tired.
- Once these naps start to affect your sleep at night, try to reduce the length and frequency of the naps until you no longer need them.

Extreme tiredness (Fatigue)

Extreme tiredness, may or may not be related to a lack of sleep. Often, after brain surgery extreme tiredness can occur throughout the day and is caused by the body's increased effort to process information. There are two types of tiredness commonly experienced after brain surgery;

- Physical: which occurs during periods of activity such as walking to the bathroom or gardening. For most people extreme physical tiredness tends to go away after six months.
- Mental: occurs during periods of thinking, for example you may find it difficult to concentrate while writing an email or letter when usually this would not be a problem.

How to reduce the effects of extreme tiredness

- Complete projects that require more energy in the morning as this is often when you feel more awake.
- Limit daytime activities and ensure you rest.
- Eat a balanced diet with three healthy meals a day. Avoid sugar.
- Gentle exercise has been shown to improve memory, therefore walking may help.
- Gentle exercise for your brain is also helpful, try crosswords or reading.
- When returning to work it is best to start slowly and build up, for example start

working 1 – 2 hours a day and increasing each week until you are ready for a full day.

- Your occupational Therapist may have some additional information on energy conservation. Please speak to your nurse to arrange this.

Memory

It is common to forget information after a brain injury or neurosurgery. There are three types of memory which may be affected;

- Immediate memory – this is your ability to recall new information instantly.
- Short term memory – this is your ability to store information and recall it for 30 minutes.
- Long term memory – this is information we store in our mind and can recall after a day, a week, 10 years or longer.

It is often short term memory that is impaired following brain surgery and these strategies can help;

- Put items in the same place each time such as keys, phone and wallet.
- Keep a note pad or diary handy to take note of important information or things you need to do during the day, week or month.
- Use the notepad to keep note of important points from the doctor.
- Try to remember people through association. If you meet a guy called Peter, you might have a relative called Peter.

Anxiety

Brain surgery is a major event and it can cause feelings of anxiety in many people both before and after surgery, this is normal. To help reduce these feelings try the following five relaxation steps for two minutes;

- Breathe in quietly through your nose and slowly out through your nose.
- Breathe in quietly through your nose and slowly out through your mouth making your mouth as small as possible like drinking from a straw.

- Breathe in quietly through your nose counting in your head 1001, 1002, 1003. Breathe out through your mouth counting in your head 1001, 1002, 1003, 1004, 1005.
- Breathe in quietly through your nose counting 1001, 1002, 1003. Breathe out quietly through your mouth saying in your head the word 'calm'

You can practice this when not anxious as it will help you remember when you are feeling anxious.

Emotions

Following surgery some people feel very emotional, either through anger, frustration or sadness (crying). These feelings are common after brain surgery as your thought processes and memories change.

How can I control my emotions?

- Try to leave a situation if you feel you are becoming emotional, walk away or leave the room.
- Try a time out strategy with family and friends, use a code or signal to identify when you need a break for 15 minutes.
- If you find it hard to identify when your emotions are exaggerated, ask a family member or friend to watch you and let you know when you are becoming irritable, so you can use your time out signal and leave the situation.

Contact us

While you are in hospital please talk to your nurse if you have any questions.

Once you have left hospital please speak to your neurosurgeon at your next appointment or your GP.

Or you can contact HealthLine, a free health information service. 0800 611 116