Understanding Traumatic Brain Injury: Part 3

RECAP FROM PART 2...

Mike is home from the hospital and his emotional changes are causing his family some stress. They’re working to find ways to overcome these challenges.

CREATING A ROUTINE

Establishing and maintaining a routine can help you or your loved one feel more secure in their environment.

MIKE’S DAILY ROUTINE...

As Mike is recovering he has less appointments, he’s replacing them with things that reinforce what he did in therapy.

MIKE’S WEEKLY ROUTINE...

Support groups can be a helpful way to connect with people who have similar experiences.

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Providing Structure at Home

Other ways to provide structure for people who’ve had a TBI. (Some of the following suggestions may not apply to your situation.)

- Maintain a photo album with labeled pictures of friends, family, and familiar places
- Place needed objects within easy reach
- Work to maintain familiar family dynamics (for example, if a person normally got to choose a restaurant for eating out, try to continue this)
- Even if speaking is difficult, include everyone in family conversations and social activities
- Be normal and act natural

COPING STRATEGIES

It may be helpful to adjust the roles of family members to deal with the effects of the injury.

I THINK THAT ON SOME LEVEL WE ALL KIND OF THOUGHT THAT WHEN MIKE CAME HOME THINGS WOULD BE BACK TO NORMAL, BUT THEY’RE NOT.

THERE’S SO MUCH MORE TO DO NOW.

We’re all helping out at home and getting Mike to appointments. Right now, his schedule is the only one on the calendar. Could you guys add yours too?

Well, we made it through the week.

TGIF!

Let’s talk about stress. Mike’s injury has been rough on all of us. We should do some things about it.

Great idea! I can work from home a couple days a week.

I’ll copy my plans out of my phone right now.

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What’s a coping strategy?

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What’s a coping strategy?
Your loved one’s injury has caused changes to your life. You probably haven’t experienced anything like this so the coping strategies you’ve used in the past may not help.

Common Coping Strategies:

- Taking time for yourself
- Keeping a regular schedule
- Getting regular exercise such as taking a 20-30min walk each day
- Participating in support groups
- Maintaining a sense of humor
- Being more assertive about getting the support you need
- Changing roles and responsibilities within the family

The best thing you can do is to be open to trying new ways of coping and find out what works for you.

I know that bothers you, can you think of any ways to deal with that frustration?

I usually just make a joke...

Humor is a good way to deal with stress!

I always feel great when I have a routine of going to the gym...

Exercise is a great way of dealing with all kinds of things, stress, depression, and even anxiety...

This curry chicken is great! Can I have some more?

Crap! Why do I keep doing that?

Let’s brainstorm ways to deal with stressful or frustrating things.

It bugs me when people think I’m fine since I’m out of the hospital.

There is so much going on with school and life, that sometimes I just want to be alone.

That’s a good one Sam! “Take time for yourself”
THE FIRST WEEKS AFTER INJURY

In the first few weeks after a brain injury, damage or changes to the brain often affect its ability to function. The person may not show signs of awareness and their eyes may remain closed. Brain function usually improves as swelling decreases, and blood flow and brain chemistry stabilize. In time brain function usually improves, leading the person with a TBI to be more responsive.

Don't worry Mike, it's just water.

I know but I should have known that the glass was there!

Don't be down on yourself, Mike you're still getting better and you've already come so far!

It's still really hard.

It is difficult to predict long-term outcomes based on a brain scan. However the length of a coma and the duration of memory loss (post-traumatic amnesia) are useful in predicting how well a person will recover.
It's possible to have a scan that doesn't show any damage but still have a severe injury and be in a coma.

Diffuse Axonal Injury (DAI)

Brain cells are called neurons. They are connected to each other with fibers called axons. The axons let the neurons talk to each other. A trauma to the head can harm axons by stretching or pulling them. If an axon is hurt too badly, the neuron it is connected to will not survive.

This happens at a microscopic level throughout the brain so it's not possible to see this on a brain scan.

Neurochemical Response to TBI

Sometimes the chemical balance of the brain is upset after a TBI. In a normally functioning brain, chemicals called “NeuroTransmitters” let neurons communicate with each other. Groups of neurons work together to do different things. A TBI can increase or decrease the amount of neuro-transmitters in the brain, changing a persons thinking or behavior. As the chemical balance of the brain returns to normal the person’s ability to function will improve. This usually happens within the first few weeks after TBI but can sometimes take months.

Open Head Injuries

With open head injuries the skull and other layers that protect the brain are penetrated and exposed to the air. A classic example of an open head injury is a gunshot wound to the head. Damage following an open head injury tends to be limited to a specific area of the brain. However these injuries can still be as severe as closed head injuries depending on the path of the bullet or other object in the brain.

Controlling Intracranial Pressure (ICP) is a main focus of medical treatment early after a TBI. Sometimes part of the skull is temporarily removed until the swelling reduces.
HEALING OVER TIME

MIKE’S 2 YEAR CHECKUP

WOW MIKE, YOU LOOK GREAT! I CAN’T BELIEVE THAT IT’S ALREADY BEEN TWO YEARS!

THANKS, I FEEL GREAT.

SO I KNOW THAT YOU’VE MOVED OUT SINCE I’VE SEEN YOU LAST.

YEAH, IT’S BEEN OVER A YEAR NOW.

But that’s behind us now.

Mike’s injury affected all of us and things won’t ever be the same but, I’m ok with that. Things would have changed anyway.

Post Injury

Information collected by the TBI Model System Study from people who sustained moderate to severe TBIs shows that two years post injury:

- 93% of people are living in private residences
- 34% are living with their spouse or significant other
- 29% are living with their parents
- 34% require some type of supervision during either the day or night
- 33% are employed
- 3% are students
- 29% are unemployed
- 26% are retired for any reason

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I also volunteer at Children’s Hospital and the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation is helping me go back to school.

I have a girlfriend! But... I’m still trying to figure out who I am since my injury... so it’s not serious.

That’s very insightful, Mike.

Oh! I did a driver’s ed “tune up” with Raj, so I’m driving again!

I’m glad that you’re doing so well and have a good attitude!

I’ve come to terms with my new situation, and over the last couple of years I’ve gotten closer to my family, especially Sam.

I would never wish for Mike’s injury but there are positive things that came from it...

We all had to work together to help Mike and in the process our communication has gotten better and we learned a lot about each other...

I learned a lot about myself too!

I think we all have...
SOURCE

The health information presented in this Graphic Fact Sheet is based on evidence from research and/or professional consensus and has been reviewed and approved by an editorial team of experts from the TBI Model Systems.

AUTHORSHIP AND ILLUSTRATION

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