

# Emotions and Wellbeing following Acquired Brain Injury



## *A guide for Patients, Families and Carers*

### **Emotions and Wellbeing following Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)**

Experiencing an acquired brain injury (ABI) can lead to changes in many areas of a person's life, including their physical abilities, communication, behaviour, thinking, emotions, work, family and social life. Everybody copes in different ways to major life events, stressful situations or life changes.

People who have experienced an ABI have identified a number of coping strategies (ways that help them cope). Some coping strategies that have been helpful for NRH patients in dealing with their emotions after ABI include:

- **Talking about how you feel:** Talking about how you feel to family, friends, professionals.
- **Understanding your brain injury:** Finding out as much information as possible about your brain injury and the changes that can often occur after brain injury.
- **Having goals:** Identifying goals to work towards, and breaking these goals down into manageable steps – short, medium and long term goals.
- **Recognising progress:** Keeping note of progress you are making, no matter how small, for example, keeping a diary of progress as it happens.
- **Enjoyable activities:** Identifying enjoyable activities that help when you are feeling low, such as going outside, watching TV, reading a book, calling someone on the telephone, listening to music, taking part in some exercise, going for a tea or coffee.
- **Support:** Meeting others who have experienced an ABI and sharing stories.

### **Stress**

Stress is an emotion that often arises in response to difficult situations. Understandably, the many changes following an ABI can lead to stress for some people.

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## What are the signs of stress?

- **In the body:** Rapid heartbeat, muscle tension, upset stomach, sweaty hands, headaches, breathing fast, sleep disrupted.
- **Feelings:** Anxious, worried, frustrated, tense, irritable.

If you are worried or stressed, talk to a member of the rehabilitation team, a Psychologist, Doctor, Nurse or Therapist.

## Ways of dealing with stress

- **Recognise when you are feeling stressed:** What are you doing or thinking when you notice you are feeling stressed?
- **Understand stress and anxiety:** Find out more information. Ask for more information from the team or your doctor.
- **Coping strategies:** Try out different coping strategies, such as relaxation, slow breathing, meditation, exercise, distraction, problem-solving. If you would like to know more about these, ask a member of the team.
- **Talking:** Talking about how you feel can help.
- **Positive Self-Talk:** Use some positive statements about yourself.

## Depression

Some people experience low mood or depression following brain injury. Symptoms of depression: feeling low, or 'down in the dumps'; no longer enjoying activities or previous interests, feeling irritable, feeling hopeless or helpless; sleeping a lot more or a lot less than usual, feeling self-critical, self-blaming; low motivation; having suicidal thoughts. If you are feeling low or think you might be experiencing depression, talk to a member of the team, a psychologist, doctor, nurse or therapist.

## Ways of dealing with depression

- **Talking:** Talking to someone about how you feel, such as a Psychologist.
- **Identify negative thoughts:** Identify negative thoughts that you are having. 'Challenge' the negative thoughts.

Identify enjoyable and pleasurable activities. Plan these into your schedule. Even if you don't feel like doing them, encourage yourself to '*Do it anyway!*'