

# Returning home after an Acquired Brain Injury

The transition from hospital to home for a person with an acquired brain injury can be a stressful time. The injured person and their family may need to adjust to a drop in the level of medical and rehabilitation supports that were available in hospital. Additionally, due to the nature of brain injury, a person may have fewer resources to cope with the stress caused by the change. In some cases even mild problems can impact on day to day behaviours.

## Preparing for the Discharge home

Liaising with the social work and the nursing teams in the hospital can help in planning the discharge process. Equip yourself with as much information as possible about sources of help and support in the community, including local health services and organisations, follow up services from the hospital, your GP, and other people that can help.

Remember that many people with acquired brain injury may need further help from the hospital system so try to clarify how you can access this before the person leaves hospital.

## At Home

Structure and routine are essential for a person with brain injury. Families, friends and employers can work together to create a daily schedule that enables the person with the injury to function independently with as little stress and anxiety as possible.

## For the person with ABI

Tips for minimizing stress and anxiety include:

- Have a balanced diet and take supplements
- Get sufficient sleep
- Use relaxation and stress reduction techniques
- Avoid alcohol, drugs and cigarettes
- Take regular exercise
- Ensure medication is taken correctly

Routine is essential in order to function independently and setting a timetable each day will help to ensure the day runs as smoothly as possible. Sleeping and eating meals at set times each day will help build a routine for you and your family.

To aid memory record plans in a daily planner, diary or electronic organiser in the order you need to do them. Get into the habit of checking your plans every day or the night before. Helpful strategies include:

- Using a note pad by the phone
- Making use of a large notice board to record plans
- Set up an information centre where things are kept such as keys, documents, etc...
- Label or colour code cupboards to point out where things are kept
- Use a "To Do" list to record goals and wipe things off as they are done

Setting goals is important to keep motivated and focused along with enabling you to overcome negativity and gain control of your life. It is

important to know your strengths and weaknesses and to set realistic aims. The best way to achieve a goal is design a schedule with:

- A goal
- Tasks/steps
- Time frame
- Aim for completion
- Potential hurdles
- How to overcome hurdles
- Benefits of achieving the goal
- How to rate success

#### **For the carer**

There are many things that a person caring for someone with acquired brain injury can do to make the process of rehabilitation as easy as possible.

Strategies to help include:

- Try to keep a strict routine
- Write down daily activities and keep a daily personal planner with "To Do" lists
- Post a calendar in an obvious place such as refrigerator outlining main appointments or activities
- Start major projects such as holidays or holding a party well in advance and write out detailed step-by-step lists
- Remind the person of any changes as far in advance as possible

Communicating and conveying your message to a person with a brain injury can be difficult. The key is to develop strategies that will help you to put your message across such as:

- Establish eye contact and then pause to allow time for engagement
- Do not discuss important subjects when there is background noise such as TV, radio or dishwasher
- Take note of the time of day when you want to deliver a message as fatigue is common with an injury
- Write any instructions or plans legibly in large and neat writing
- Write notes for important conversations such as family holidays, appointments etc.
- Put up step-by-step instructions for daily activities such as cleaning, calling the bank, operating an ATM etc.
- Repeat important pieces of information casually in conversation

#### **Guidelines to help you cope**

- Be patient and tolerant especially with yourself.
- Don't isolate yourself. Involve family members, friends or neighbours
- Remember that the goals set must be realistic
- Be creative and flexible, change something if it not working for you
- Keep a record charting the goals the family has achieved