



Information for You from Your Health Care Team

Caregiver Tips
Cognitive (“Thinking”) Changes After Brain Injury

After a brain injury, your loved one may have changes in how they think, act and feel. There are many things you can do as a caregiver to make coming home easier.

Listed below are some common changes that people have after a brain injury. Your loved one may have one or more of these changes. There are also some ideas for you to make things easier at home, depending on the problem.

Please ask your nurse or therapist for help if you have any questions about the information in this table.

Possible Problems	What it means	What your loved one might say	How you can help
Decreased attention	Your loved one is not able to focus or concentrate.	“What did you say?”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit noise. • Limit distractions. • Try to keep things calm. • Try to keep things organized. • Try to make sure your loved one’s day has structure. • Have your loved one repeat back what you say to them.
Confusion	Things do not make sense to your loved one.	“I can’t think.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show your loved one a calendar daily. • Repeat date and time often. • Focus on familiar things.

Possible Problems	What it means	What your loved one might say	How you can help
Lack of self-awareness	Your loved one does not understand that something is wrong.	“Why do I need someone to be with me all the time?”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give gentle reminders of what happened. • Gently point out problem areas.
Depression	If your loved one feels sad or hopeless, they may be depressed.	“What’s the point?”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to be supportive and not critical. • Try to focus on positive things. • Help your loved one talk to a doctor about how they are feeling.
Difficult problem solving	Your loved one has a hard time figuring things out.	“How do I do that?”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk through tasks before having your loved one perform them. • Practice tasks. • Encourage your loved one to try tasks. • Do not solve problems for your loved one. Give clues and ideas. Let them try to solve problems on their own.
Decreased judgment/ Safety	Your loved one does not understand why something would be unsafe.	“Why can’t I drive?” “Why can’t I cook?”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a safe environment at home. • Point out unsafe conditions. • Provide supervision and clues for harder tasks. • Talk through tasks together before having your loved one do them.

Possible Problems	What it means	What your loved one might say	How you can help
Denial	Your loved one does not believe anything is wrong.	“There’s nothing wrong with me.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind your loved one they have had a brain injury. • Give specific examples of problem areas.
Trouble planning and organizing	Your loved one may find it hard to mentally sort through something they need to do.	Your loved one might try to put their shoes on before their socks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have your loved one write things down to organize thoughts. • Organize the home environment. • Go over each step of a task and repeat the steps.
Changes in memory	Your loved one has a hard time remembering things.	“What did I have for breakfast?” “Now, when is my birthday?”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep a logbook of activities done during the day. • Ask your loved one to repeat new information out loud. • Give cues at first rather than the answer. • Hang up a calendar of events. • Hang up easy-to-see list of emergency phone numbers.
Slow processing speed	Your loved one thinks slowly.	“You are talking to fast!”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep conversations short. • Listen and be patient. • Do not have too many people talking at once. • Avoid changing topics frequently. • Allow time for person to process information.