

# Heads Up!

News, Ideas and Resources from ABIRT

Winter 2017

The **Acquired Brain Injury Rehabilitation Team (ABIRT)** is a community interdisciplinary team working across the Southern Health and Social Care Trust with service users and their families & friends that have been affected by a brain injury. We work with service users who have suffered a **traumatic brain injury** (e.g. as a result of a car accident, fall or assault) or **acquired brain injury** (e.g. brain damage because of a lack of oxygen to the brain or infection such as encephalitis or meningitis).



Our team has Clinical Psychology, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Social Work, Speech and Language and Admin

We work with people affected by brain injury to help them understand and compensate for difficulties following brain injury such as reduced memory, personality change and communication problems. We also provide psychological and emotional support to help family members to adjust to life following brain injury. We support people to increase their physical abilities, strength, balance and stamina; build their independence and roles in everyday life; and to help them to return to education or employment where possible.

Recovering from a brain injury can be a huge challenge. Sometimes, one of the most helpful and inspiring things is simply hearing from others who have gone through recovery and faced similar challenges. Have you or a loved one survived a brain injury? Have you a story you'd like to share? If so, we would love to hear from you! Contact us on  028 38 398350



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## ASK ABIRT

In this regular column ABIRT staff will answer your questions about brain injury in the strictest confidence. Please send us questions by phone or email (see below).

Q: "I feel so tired after my injury... like I can't think straight ...even though it happened three months ago .. is this normal?"

A: Yes, fatigue is very common after brain injury. If you push yourself too hard, you may have increased pain, fatigue, feeling "foggy"/ 'brain shutdown' and sometimes even have 'meltdowns'. There are lots of things you can do to help with this. Allow yourself time to heal slowly, your fatigue should improve over time. Try to get a good night's sleep. Pace yourself, don't do too much during the day. Maintain a healthy diet and get some good exercise daily. Look at our top tips for sleep on the next page!

**Looking after yourself** when you have a loved one who has had a brain injury is not easy. You will probably devote much of your time to looking after them, as well as the rest of your family who have to cope with the anxiety and trauma. For some carers, things may have changed to the extent where you may have had to give up work totally or partially; you may have a new and very different role. In all this you may consider that your feelings and needs are not important compared to everyone else's. **But it is important that you take care of yourself.** It is not selfish. Taking care of yourself will help you to take the best care of your loved one and family. When our lives change suddenly we can feel worn down and it may be harder to do the things we need to do. At these times we may be more vulnerable to feeling sad or angry. This can lead to us not eating or sleeping well, which can in turn prolong feeling low. Looking after our physical and mental health can help reduce the impact of these feelings. See if you can ensure that you take some time each day to be as kind to yourself as possible.

**Tips for a healthier brain** Exercise regularly and challenge your brain – don't be a couch potato. Nourish your brain with a healthy diet, avoid drinking alcohol. Get into a good routine. Make "safety first" a priority – wear a helmet, drive safely, take any head injury seriously. Remember if you have an existing brain injury you are more at risk of another one – minimise the risks. Learn to manage stress and low mood. Relax and sleep well. Have regular checks for blood pressure, diabetes, heart rate, cholesterol. Don't smoke or use illegal drugs.

Trouble sleeping?

Good sleep is essential to recover from a brain injury. Here's what works:

- Avoid caffeine after lunch/dinner.
- Don't watch TV in bed
- Don't use a computer/tablet for at least an hour before bed
- Use blackout curtains and wear socks but have a cool room.
- Go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time every morning (no matter what happened during the night).
- Have a rest during the day if you need it from (e.g. 12-1pm) but don't sleep in the afternoon.

**NEW!**

"Mytherapy": NHS reviewed App Website for Brain Injury

<https://www.my-therapy.co.uk/>

An "app" can be downloaded to a mobile device, such as a phone. Some "health apps" can help people with a brain injury recover from their injury, when used together with therapy and rehabilitation, but using the right app is important. "Mytherapy" – helps people find the right app to meet their needs. Have a look and see if one will help you!

**Research in Australia has found falls from ladders were the most frequent "DIY" injury during 2013-2014, with nearly 1 in 10 resulting in an "intracranial injury such as a concussion".**

Falls are now the leading cause of traumatic brain injury across the developed world. "DIY" injuries were most frequent in men aged 65 to 74 and ladder-related falls were the most common cause of injury.

## 5 of the best .... Websites

- <https://www.headway.ie/>
- <https://www.headway.org.uk/>
- <https://www.braininjuryhub.co.uk>
- <http://braininjurymatters.org.uk/>
- <http://ukabif.org.uk/head-and-brain-injury-information-signpost/> Next time ... 5 of the best .. Memory Strategies