



# TBI TODAY

News, Ideas, and Resources from the Virginia TBI Model System

## MANAGING STRESS EFFECTIVELY AFTER TBI, PART II

In our last issue, we wrote about stress and the effects of stress on our daily lives. You may recall that we gave some signs of "stress overload":

- ▶ Disorganization (forgetting your keys, losing things, making a lot of "dumb mistakes")
- ▶ Daydreaming about spending a few days somewhere, even in the hospital - to sleep, read, be taken care of
- ▶ Trouble making even small decisions (having difficulty figuring out what to wear, feeling stumped about what to have for lunch)
- ▶ Feeling depressed (wanting to curl up on a bed, pull the covers up over your head, and sleep for a week)

What do you do if you feel overloaded with stress? Here are some ideas to help you cope with stress. Review the list and try out some of the ideas.

### TAKE BREAKS OFTEN

- ✎ Famous last words, "I can't take a break. People will think I'm lazy and that I don't care."
- ✎ Realize that most family members don't give them-

selves enough rest

- ✎ Realize that working harder doesn't necessarily mean accomplishing more; instead, recognize that taking breaks can help you accomplish more and feel better
- ✎ Avoid the cycle of going beyond your limits, spinning your wheels, and becoming frustrated
- ✎ Take several 20 – 30 minute breaks each day, take more time if needed
- ✎ If you can't spare 20 minutes take 10, a short break is better than no break
- ✎ If you are working, make your home a more comfortable place by leaving your work at work

### MAKE A LIST

- ✎ List what you need to do in the short- and long-term, and set priorities - number items by priority
- ✎ Start with number 1 and work your way down the list, crossing off each accomplished item
- ✎ Regularly review your accomplishments to help you keep a positive perspective
- ✎ Realize that you can only

do one or maybe two things at a time effectively

- ✎ Remember that "good" things can also be stressful; planning and having a birthday party, preparing to visit and visiting other family members
- ✎ Don't forget activities related to helping yourself (e.g., getting rest, spending time with other family members) can also be important priorities
- ✎ Learn and recognize the difference between what you "have to" do and "want to" do

### SET REASONABLE GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS

- ⊙ Learn to recognize what you do best
- ⊙ Recognize your limitations, most relate to being human
- ⊙ Avoid letting people pressure you into taking on more than you can handle
- ⊙ Recognize what others do best and ask for their help
- ⊙ If you keep missing deadlines, be less ambitious
- ⊙ Distinguish between what you want and expect and

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what other people want and expect from you

- ⊙ Recognize and avoid harmful feelings like guilt and frustration

### LEARN AND APPLY NEGOTIATION SKILLS

- ☛ Realize that few of your responsibilities are “set in stone,” and most people who expect you to do things are willing to negotiate
- ☛ With other family members and co-workers, negotiate timelines and the amount of responsibilities you agree to take on
- ☛ If you are afraid of negotiating, practice by rehearsing “in your head”
- ☛ Realize that taking on too much too soon will cause failure
- ☛ Balance wanting to please with your knowledge of what you must do to succeed

### LEARN AND USE RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

- ♪ Breathe slowly and deeply
- ♪ Close your eyes and imagine yourself in a relaxing situation
- ♪ Listen to soothing music
- ♪ Take a walk
- ♪ Talk to someone you like

### TELL YOURSELF THINGS THAT WILL HELP

- ⊃ *I'm doing the best that I can*
- ⊃ *I'm a good person, I'm trying*
- ⊃ *If I take my time I'll do things right*
- ⊃ *Things will work out for the best*
- ⊃ *We've really come a long way since he was hurt*
- ⊃ *I can count on faith, my friends, and family to help me through*

### AVOID PUSHING YOURSELF TOO HARD OR PUTTING YOURSELF DOWN

- ⊙ *I've got to do more*
- ⊙ *I've got to try harder*
- ⊙ *I've got to get this done right away*
- ⊙ *I should have finished a week ago*
- ⊙ *I'm letting everyone down*
- ⊙ *I'll never get another chance*
- ⊙ *I can't believe I'm doing so bad*

### ASK FOR HELP

- ☛ Seek help from people that have offered
- ☛ Recognize that asking for help is better than failing
- ☛ Don't let your pride get in the way
- ☛ Recognize that everyone needs help sometimes

- ☛ Better to ask early on than right before you fail

### COMMON SENSE STRATEGIES CAN HELP YOU BE STRONG

- Υ Focus on one thing at a time
- Υ Work on your hardest responsibilities at times when you feel most fresh and rested
- Υ Have “quiet times” for everyone, noise can increase stress and reduce productivity

### HAVE A BACK UP PLAN

- ☛ Failing and not knowing what to do next is a bad situation
- ☛ Any time you plan something, have a back-up plan
- ☛ Recognize your human imperfections, most people fail sometimes
- ☛ When your first approach doesn't work, go to your back-up

### RECOGNIZE THAT LIFE HAS MANY CHALLENGES

- ▶ Brain injury or not, many people struggle to enjoy successful lives
- ▶ Recognize that many of the issues you face are faced by others
- ▶ Be patient, everyone finds obstacles on the road to success
- ▶ Recognize that persistence, faith, and your good character will help you to succeed in time



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