

## Brain Injury/ Neurocognitive Disorders

### **Definition**

A brain injury, also called a neurocognitive disorder may be the result of a trauma to the head acquired after birth. Traumatic brain injury can be confined to one area of the brain (focal) or may involve more than one area (diffuse). A brain injury can occur from a number of causes, such as motor vehicle accidents or other accidents, falls, and sports injuries. Other potential causes of injury could include strokes, aneurisms, disorders, seizures and infectious diseases.

### **Documentation**

Documentation of a brain injury needs to be completed within the last five years by a Certified Neurologist, Neuropsychologist, Psychiatrist or Physician. With this documentation students may be eligible to access appropriate support services and possibly adaptive technology to reduce barriers to learning.

### **Symptoms**

The effects a brain injury may have on an individual can vary from one person to another. Activities that were once automatic may now require a much greater effort. Some common impairments an individual may experience are:

- **Cognitive:** memory, concentration, information processing speed, planning, problem solving, multi-tasking, reasoning, communication and lack of insight
- **Social/Emotional:** agitation, anger, anxiety, depression, irritability, mental inflexibility, mood swings, poor social awareness, reduced motivation, rigidity
- **Physiological:** sleep patterns, mental fatigue, headache, energy levels, appetite disturbances, personality alterations/behavior, sensory (loss of taste and smell)

### **Student Strategies & Accommodations**

- Meet with the Accessibility Coordinator several months before starting your course. They can help you plan, provide support and possibly assist in accessing adaptive technology. It is your responsibility to provide appropriate documentation.
- Reduce your course load. Symptoms are exacerbated by stress.

- Use a Daily Planner to organize yourself. Write everything down in one spot! Write in all projects, exams, and appointments at the beginning of the semester.
- Make lists.
- Organize each course and notes using dividers &/or separate folders. Paper copies of material is most helpful.
- Avoid overload & fatigue -- take breaks, have a rest! Find a quiet place and go for a walk or take a nap; wear earplugs; dim the lights; wear sunglasses. Learning, thinking, reading may take greater effort and will contribute to fatigue. Breaks are necessary to refresh yourself.
- Pace yourself.
- Break information into smaller bits. If you have something tough to learn, break it down into smaller bits, learning each bit at a time.
- Use association to help you retrieve information later.
- Work with a tutor and/or study group for additional academic support.
- Develop healthy eating habits and drink plenty of water.
- Accommodations may include:
  - Tape/record lectures and/or photocopy class notes.
  - Use a note taker.
  - Get books in an audio format (must be requested in advance, and is contingent upon correct documentation and availability).
  - Extra time and a quiet room to write exams.
- Educate yourself thoroughly about your disorder so that you can develop a support group and advocate for yourself.

\*These are suggestions only -- you are the best judge of what will work for you.

### ***Instructor Strategies & Accommodations***

College can be overwhelming for a student with acquired brain injury. Instructors, who are approachable and strive to create learning environments that welcome individual differences, can be instrumental in students having a positive college experience. The effects a brain injury may have on an individual can vary from one person to another, but the following guidelines are applicable to many students:

- If a student approaches you about struggles they are having, assist them in developing a plan for being successful in your course (this can be done in conjunction with the Accessibility Coordinator).
- Allow processing time between the question or direction given, and the response time of the student.

- Provide an outline prior to the lecture so the student may focus on the lecture.
- An appropriate accommodation for the student may be to write exams in a separate, quiet setting with extra time so that they can concentrate and focus on the exam with minimal distractions.
- Other accommodations may include a recording of lectures (some instructors do this because they teach online courses) and/or photocopying lecture notes.
- Encourage students to seek support and develop study skills and time management strategies through the Learning and Study Skills Centre, tutors, the Counselling Centre and Accessibility Services.
- Most students with a disability function best when classes are structured and expectations are clear. Unannounced changes can be stressful. Sometimes facilitating study partners or helping a student to join a team during group work will alleviate stress.

## Links

West Kootenay Brain Injury Association

[www.braininjury.kics.bc.ca/info\\_facts.html](http://www.braininjury.kics.bc.ca/info_facts.html)

Brain Injury Association of Queensland

[www.biaq.com.au](http://www.biaq.com.au)

Vancouver Island Head Injury Association

[www.biasvi.org/about/about.htm](http://www.biasvi.org/about/about.htm)

Traumatic Brain Injuries Guide

[www.tbiguide.com](http://www.tbiguide.com)

Brain Injury Resource Center Checklist

<http://www.headinjury.com/checktbi.htm>