

Addictions following Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) **Advice for people with ABI, family members and carers**

People who have an ABI are particularly susceptible to developing addictive behaviours. This may be due to one or a combination of the following factors; damage to the brain, which can diminish a person's ability to regulate their behaviour, pre-existing addictive behaviours, the difficult process of adjusting to life with an ABI and social isolation. Almost anything that produces a rewarding outcome has the potential to become addictive. Common addictions include drugs, alcohol, gambling, work, success, sex, pornography and even shopping.

If you, or a person you are supporting, are struggling with addictive behaviours:

- It is important to understand the benefit you derive from your addiction. Once you have done this it is helpful to figure out alternative ways of meeting this need rather than via addictive behaviour.
- It is important to grieve the losses related to your ABI. Grieving and accepting these losses are important steps in the process of coming to terms with your life and the life changes you are facing, following ABI.
- Try to make some plans for your future focusing on the things you would like to achieve and those things that will bring you satisfaction and reward. Once you have set some goals, even if small, you are likely to feel more positive about the future and as such, addictive behaviours will be easier to stop or manage.
- Carefully weigh up the pro's and con's of making a change versus continuing the addiction. You may decide that you do not want to change your behaviour for the present and as such, are willing to accept the negative aspects of your addiction. Alternatively, you may decide that you have had enough of the negative aspects of your addiction and are willing to participate in the process of change. People rarely change addictive behaviours unless they are personally motivated to so. If you choose to continue the addictive behaviour, you may want to review this decision in the future.

- Understand that in order to participate in most addictions people generally need to justify to themselves that their behaviour is okay. Think about how you give yourself permission to feed your addiction and start giving yourself more helpful messages, perhaps challenging the way you justify your behaviour.
- Know what your high risk situations are and carefully plan how you will deal with these situations. For example, if you know that in the past you have dealt with family stress by over investing in your commitment to work, be aware of this habit and plan how you will deal with family stress more productively.
- Recognise that breaking an addiction involves breaking habits. Look carefully at how your day to day life allows you to participate in your addiction and make as many changes as you are able.
- Tell a trusted and supportive person about your addiction. Ask them to keep an eye out for you in the future, and to check in with you periodically about the progress you are making in changing your behaviour. It is much harder to continue addictive behaviour when those people around you are aware of its existence.

This information sheet has been prepared by Melbourne ABI Counselling. Melbourne ABI Counselling provides specialist counselling for people affected by Acquired Brain Injury. If you would like to discuss your situation with a counsellor, please feel free to contact our office on **1300 29 76 09**.

For more information sheets on topics related to acquired brain injury please see <http://melbourneabiccounselling.com.au/abi-information-sheets.htm>