

Anxiety and Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)

Advice for People with ABI, Family Members and Carers

People with ABI, their family members and carers, commonly report experiencing anxiety. For an individual with an ABI, anxiety can be related to the new challenges and difficulties resulting from the injury and, in some cases, to the circumstances under which the injury was sustained; for example a car accident or an assault over which they had no control. After sustaining an ABI, a person may be anxious in social situations, anxious in situations that remind them of their illness or accident, anxious about their future or anxious when attempting tasks or activities which are impacted by their ABI. Often family members experience high levels of anxiety when a person with an ABI is taking the risks required to increase their independence. For example, the first time a person with an ABI catches public transport independently or the first day a child with an ABI returns to school after their injury. This anxiety is understandable but needs to be managed to allow for further progress, opportunities for learning and the expansion of skills.

If you or someone you are concerned about is experiencing anxiety, and have an ABI, it might be helpful to:

- Find someone to talk to about your anxiety. This could be a trusted friend, close family member or a counsellor. Telling people about how you feel and situations in which this feeling occurs can help you start to make some changes.
- Learn as much about anxiety as you can. The more you know about anxiety, the greater the chance of being able to beat it.
- If you have distressing memories confront them rather than avoid them. The more you avoid something, the more fear-evoking it becomes. You may find it helpful to consult a counsellor if you have difficulty doing this.
- Learn which situations, thoughts, memories and experiences trigger your anxiety and learn to deal with these triggers. If you are able to identify anxious feelings when they start and then take active steps to calm yourself, your body will gradually learn that you are not in danger, which will then lead to a reduction in your level of anxiety.

- Learn to challenge and settle your thoughts and beliefs when you become anxious.
- Learn what you can do to calm yourself down when you get anxious. For example, go for a walk, have a bath, call a friend, do some gardening, write down your worries or listen to relaxing music.
- If you are doing too much in your life, or have too many responsibilities, do what you can to make more time for you. Learn to say 'no'.
- Expand your repertoire of activities that help you feel relaxed, and plan ahead so that you make time for them during your week.

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>