



Addiction and the Brain Supportive Information Session

Please note that in the SIS various stimulants were mentioned including prescribed medications such as 'Ritalin'. When used as prescribed by a physician this is a safe medication. However, medications like Ritalin, can be misused to get an intended outcome and this is what is being referenced in this SIS.

How the brain changes with the presence of crystal meth:

<https://youtu.be/T-duk-PilXo>

Helpful ideas

- If you're easily distracted, do one thing at a time. For example, don't fix dinner and watch TV at the same time.
- Talk with friends and family before making important decisions.
- Start keeping a journal with your thoughts, feeling and questions. When you get answers to questions, write them down.
- Get the names and contact numbers of everyone you see about your injury in case you need to contact them again.
- Keep family and friends informed of your progress on a regular basis.
- If you are using alcohol or recreational drugs, get support to stop.
- If you have any concerns, contact your doctor.

If you need advice or help

Toronto Acquired Brain Injury Network
info@abnetwork.ca
416-597-3057

Community Head Injury Resource Services
www.chirs.com
416-240-8000

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
www.camh.net
416-535-8501 ext. 6616

Drug and Alcohol Registry of Treatment
www.dart.on.ca
1-800-565-8603

Ontario Brain Injury Association
www.obia.on.ca
1-800-263-5404

For additional information about brain injury and substance use go to:

Ohio Valley Center for Brain Injury Prevention and Rehabilitation
www.ohiovalley.org

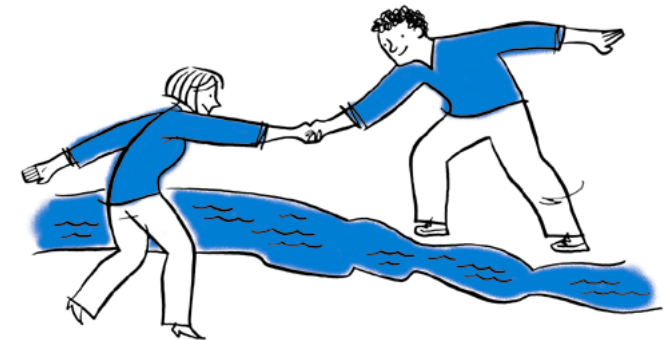


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The Substance Use / Brain Injury (SUBI) Bridging Project is a joint effort of the above organizations to provide education and treatment information on substance use following a brain injury.

BRAIN INJURY

Now what?



What to expect

No matter how you acquired your concussion or brain injury, you're likely to experience some physical and emotional symptoms as you recover. It's important that you know what to expect. It's also important that you know how to deal with the after-effects of a brain injury, and how to manage any symptoms to maximize your healing.

Common symptoms

Memory problems

Difficulty concentrating

Forgetfulness

Mood swings

Feeling worried or anxious

Feeling low or depressed

Changes in your usual personality

Inability to handle things normally

Irritability, restlessness

Trouble getting started

Balance

Headaches

Fatigue

Although these symptoms can be unpleasant and frightening, they are quite common. You should find yourself improving week by week. For concussions and mild brain injuries, most symptoms resolve in three to six months.

Help yourself heal

- Let others know how you are feeling and ask for help when you need it.
- Rest during the day.
- Get enough sleep at night.
- Return to your normal life gradually.
- Eat regularly and well.
- Don't drive a car or bike until your doctor okays it.
- Avoid more risky activities (high speed games, sports, climbing ladders, driving) that could lead to another head injury. Each new injury will make a recovery more difficult.
- Write things down if you're having trouble with your memory.
- Do not use alcohol or drugs that have not been prescribed by your doctor.
- Do not take more than the prescribed amount of prescription drugs.
- If you have concerns, call your doctor.

Effects of alcohol and recreational drugs

A brain injury kills and/or disconnects brain cells. Because of that, the injured brain reacts differently to alcohol and drugs and this interferes with healing. To recover well, the brain needs all of its resources. Here are some good reasons to avoid drugs and alcohol after a concussion or brain injury.

- People who use alcohol and other drugs do not recover as completely or as quickly.
- Problems with balance, walking and talking are made worse by alcohol and drugs.
- Difficulty with problem solving, memory and other thinking skills are made worse by alcohol and drugs.
- Alcohol and drugs have a quicker and more powerful effect on a person after a brain injury.
- Alcohol increases depression.
- Alcohol and drugs often interfere with medications prescribed after a brain injury.
- Alcohol and drugs can increase the risk of having a seizure after a brain injury.
- Alcohol and drugs can increase the risk of having another brain injury.

Dealing with Cravings: The Four Steps, Plus One

(Adapted from *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts* by Gabor Maté)

These four steps should be practiced whenever you have a craving – even daily. Find a quiet place to write. You might want to carry a notepad with you at all times to help with the process.

Step One: Relabel

When we relabel, we give up the language of need. I say to myself, “I don’t *need* to have a drink right now; I’m only having a craving. It’s not a real need but a false belief. I may have a feeling of urgency, but there is actually nothing urgent going on.”

Be aware of the sense of urgency that has taken hold and relabel it as a part of addiction rather than reality. **The point of relabeling is not to make the craving disappear – it’s not going to, at least not for a long time, since it was wired into the brain long ago.** Paying attention to the urge and the relabeling can rewire the brain.

Step Two: Reattribute

In Reattribute you learn to blame your brain. “This is my brain sending me a false message.” In this step you see where the craving is coming from. “Because they are wired into my brain and because they are easily triggered whenever I’m stressed or tired or unhappy or bored.” The urge says nothing about you as a person; it’s not a character weakness. You can take responsibility now.

Step Three: Refocus

In the Refocus step you buy yourself time. Although the craving to have a drink, drive to the casino or smoke some dope is powerful, it’s only temporary. It will pass and you have to give it time to pass. **It’s not how you feel; it’s what you do that counts.** It’s not about having “free will”, it’s about having “free won’t”.

Rather than giving into the craving, find something else to do. Your first goal can be small: buy yourself just fifteen minutes. Be sure to find something to do that you enjoy. Physical activity is often helpful.

The purpose of Refocus is to teach your brain that it doesn’t have to obey the craving. It can exercise the “free won’t.” It can choose something else.

If you cannot hold out for the fifteen minutes that’s okay. Make it five minutes and record it in your journal as a success. This is not a race you have to win, but a marathon you are training for.

Step Four: Revalue

This step could also be called Devalue. Its purpose is to help you see just what has been the real impact of the addiction in your life: disaster.

The addictive mind has been fooled into making the object of your craving (alcohol, drugs or gambling) most important. In the Revalue step you see your craving for what its worth: worse than nothing. "What has this craving done for me?" you ask. It has caused me to spend money, to be away from the ones I love, to do things that I later regretted. It has wasted my time. It has made me lie and cheat and to pretend to myself and everyone close to me.

Be aware as you write this out – and write it out several times a day if necessary. Be specific: what has been the value of the urge in your life? What happened yesterday when you allowed the urge to rule you? What happened last week? Will it happen today? Pay attention to what you feel when you remember these events. Be aware. That awareness will be your guide.

Step Five: Re-create

Life up until now has created you. You've been acting on messages wired into your brain. It is time to re-create: to choose a different life. You have values. You have passions. You have goals, talents and strengths. In your heart there is love and you want to connect that with the love in the world, in the universe. As you relabel, reattribute, refocus and revalue you are releasing patterns that have hurt you. Instead of using alcohol, drugs or gambling to try to soothe yourself, feel love or escape pain: what is the life you really want? What do you choose to create?

Write down your values and goals. See yourself living with integrity, being able to look people in the eye with compassion for them and for yourself. Re-create. Are you afraid you will stumble? Of course you will: that's called being a human being. And then you will take four steps-plus one-again.