



## **BRAIN INJURY**

When a brain injury occurs, the functions of the neurons, nerve tracts, or sections of the brain may be affected. If the neurons and nerve tracts are affected, they can be unable to or have difficulty carrying the messages that tell the brain what to do.

This can change the way a person thinks, acts, feels, and moves the body. Brain injury can also change the complex internal functions of the body, such as regulating body temperature, blood pressure, bowel, and bladder control. These changes can be temporary or permanent. They may cause impairment or a complete inability to perform a function.

Physical symptoms may include impaired movement, balance, and coordination, loss of sensation, fatigue, speaking and swallowing difficulties, and epilepsy. Cognitive impairment may include difficulties with memory, attention and concentration, speed of processing information, planning, organizing, problem solving, visual-spatial perception, and language.

Other symptoms may include agitation, irritability, lack of insight and awareness, impulsivity, lack of emotional control, self-centredness, lack of motivation, depression, anxiety and obsessive behaviour. It is important to remember that symptoms vary from individual to individual. Not unlike a fingerprint, there are not two individuals with an acquired brain injury exactly alike.

### **Persons with Brain Injury in the Workplace**

Accommodation Examples for People with Brain Injury  
(From The Job Accommodation Network and Headway)

Maintaining Concentration:

- Reduce distractions in the work area
- Provide space enclosures or a private office
- Allow for use of white noise or environmental sound machines
- Allow the employee to play soothing music using a cassette player and headset
- Increase natural lighting or provide full spectrum lighting
- Reduce clutter in the employee's work environment
- Plan for uninterrupted work time
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and steps
- Restructure job to include only essential functions

Organization:

- Make daily TO-DO lists and check items off as they are completed
- Use several calendars to mark meetings and deadlines
- Remind employee of important deadlines via memos or e-mail or weekly supervision
- Use a watch or pager with timer capability



- Use electronic organizers
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and steps
- Assign a mentor to assist employee determining goals and provide daily guidance
- Schedule weekly meetings with supervisor, manager or mentor to review goals

#### Problem Solving:

- Provide picture diagrams of problem solving techniques, e.g. flow charts
- Restructure the job to include only essential functions
- Assign a supervisor, manager or mentor to be available when the employee has questions

#### Memory:

- Allow the employee to tape record meetings
- Provide type written minutes of each meeting
- Use notebooks, calendars, or sticky notes to record information for easy retrieval
- Provide written as well as verbal instructions and checklists
- Allow additional training time
- Provide environmental cues to assist in memory for locations of items, such as labels, color coding, or bulletin boards
- Post instructions over all frequently used equipment

#### Gross Motor Impairment:

- Modify the work-site to make it accessible:
  - Provide parking close to the work-site
  - Provide an accessible entrance
  - Install automatic door openers
  - Provide an accessible restroom and break room
  - Provide an accessible route of travel to other work areas used by the employee
- Modify the workstation to make it accessible:
  - Adjust desk height if wheelchair or scooter is used
  - Make sure materials and equipment are within reach range
  - Move workstation close to other work areas, office equipment, and break rooms

#### Vision Impairment:

- Provide written information in large print
- Change fluorescent lights to high intensity, white lights
- Increase natural lighting
- Provide a glare guard for computer monitors
- Consult a vision specialist particularly

#### Fatigue/Weakness:

- Reduce or eliminate physical exertion and workplace stress
- Schedule periodic rest breaks away from the workstation
- Allow a flexible work schedule and flexible use of leave time
- Allow work from home



- Implement ergonomic workstation design
- Provide a scooter or other mobility aid if walking cannot be reduced

#### Working Effectively With Supervisors:

- Provide positive praise and reinforcement
- Provide written job instructions and work agreements
- Write clear expectations of responsibilities and the consequences
- Allow for open communication to managers and supervisors
- Establish written long term and short term goals
- Develop strategies to deal with problems before they arise
- Develop a procedure to evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodation

#### Stress:

- Provide praise and positive reinforcement
- Refer to counselling and employee assistance programs
- Allow telephone calls during work hours to doctors and others for needed support
- Provide sensitivity training to coworkers
- Allow the employee to take a break to use stress management techniques to deal with frustration

#### Attendance Issues:

- Provide flexible leave for health problems
- Provide a self-paced work load and flexible hours
- Provide part-time work schedule

#### Issues Of Change:

- Recognize that a change in the office environment or of supervisors may be difficult for a person with a brain injury
- Maintain open channels of communication between the employee and the new and old supervisor in order to ensure an effective transition
- Provide weekly or monthly meetings with the employee to discuss workplace issues and productions levels

This information was compiled by Open Door Group to assist BC businesses to have successful working relationship with persons with disabilities in our communities.

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