



Managing Fatigue, Irritability, Anger, and Thinking Problems



Traumatic Brain Injury: Managing Fatigue

- **Recognize the triggers of fatigue.** Note which people, places, or situations cause you to feel fatigued. Remember that fatigue can be related to emotions such as sadness or anger.
- **Keep an eye out for negative thinking and giving up.** Replace negative thoughts with more reasonable ones. Instead of thinking "I'll never get my energy back," think "I can slowly work back up to where my energy was before."
- **Sleep well.** Follow a consistent sleep schedule, including the weekends. Plan to get eight hours of sleep (or more), and get to bed near to the same time every evening. Don't nap during the day if it keeps you from sleeping at night.
- **Maintain healthy habits.** Exercise daily, eat a healthy diet, and avoid caffeine (including energy drinks), alcohol, drugs, and smoking.
- **Manage your schedule.** Plan a daily schedule and prioritize your activities so that you do the most important and difficult things first. If you begin to feel fatigued, you'll already have completed the most difficult tasks.
- **Don't overdo your activity level.** Stop activities before you become too fatigued. Avoid scheduling too many activities in any given day.
- **Increase your stamina.** Plan regular rest breaks, increase your level of exercise over time, and pace yourself as you resume your activities.
- **Talk to your doctor.** Ask about medical problems that may be contributing to fatigue. Review medications that you're taking to see if they're contributing to your fatigue.
- **Work on related problems.** If your fatigue is related to stress, physical pain, or depression, make sure you're addressing those problems. Counseling can help with chronic fatigue and emotional problems that may be affecting your energy level.





Managing Fatigue, Irritability, Anger, and Thinking Problems



Traumatic Brain Injury: Managing Irritability and Anger

- **Take a break.** Step away from an irritating situation. Take a walk, get a drink of water, take a few slow breaths – just give yourself a moment to cool off.
- **Give the benefit of the doubt.** Consider other ways to think about the person or situation bothering you. Consider all aspects. If the problem is with another person, try looking at things from that person's point of view.
- **Take care of things that stress you out.** Manage your irritability by decreasing your stress level. For example, creating a budget can help reduce frustrations over finances.
- **Limit your time in irritating situations.** Limit the time you spend in noisy, chaotic, or crowded situations. Know up front if a situation is going to challenge you, and make a plan in advance.
- **Communicate effectively.** Express yourself calmly, even when you're angry. Avoid yelling, name-calling, overstating your case, or physical aggression. Listen carefully to the other person. If you feel unable to stay calm, take a break.
- **Find alternative ways to manage frustration.** Write an angry letter or e-mail to a person who frustrates you *and then discard the letter or the email!* Vent to a friend who is not involved in the frustrating situation. Establish a routine exercise schedule.
- **Decrease boredom and increase independence.** Slowly re-engage in work, activities, exercise, and hobbies. Look for new activities such as volunteering or attending a veteran's group. Do things for yourself as much as possible instead of relying on others.
- **Get support.** Talk to friends and family about your irritability. Consider post-deployment counseling or support groups.
- **Increase predictability in your life.** Develop daily routines to provide structure.
- **Talk with your doctor.** Discuss medication side effects and medical problems that can cause irritability. Ask your provider about medications that might help with the underlying causes of irritability, such as depression or fatigue.
- **Work on related problems.** If your irritability is related to stress, physical pain, or depression, make sure you're addressing those problems. Counseling can help with problems involving irritability and anger.



Managing Fatigue, Irritability, Anger, and Thinking Problems



Traumatic Brain Injury: Managing Thinking Problems

- **Do brain workouts.** Keep your brain active every day by enjoying crossword puzzles, Sudoku, card games, or board games.
- **Decrease your stress level.** Limit the time you spend doing stressful activities. Lowering your stress level will lead to a better functioning brain.
- **Maintain healthy habits.** Exercise can improve your mood and help you think more clearly. If you are under medical care for concussion, be sure to check with your healthcare professional before starting an exercise plan. Other helpful habits include getting enough sleep, avoiding alcohol or drugs, and eating healthy food.
- **Use tools to help you remember.** To track important meetings and events, write things down; set alarms; ask friends to remind you of important events, or use the calendar function on your cell phone.
- **Make a routine.** Establishing a routine will decrease your stress level and help you remember the things you need. Here are some suggestions: put your keys in the same spot; get to bed at the same time in the evenings and wake up at the same time every morning; park in the same place at work.
- **Address related problems.** If your thinking problems are connected to depression, fatigue, or post-deployment stress, make sure you're addressing those problems.

