

RELATIONSHIPS

TIPS FOR NAVIGATING SOCIAL, SEXUAL AND ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Having relationships, romantic or social, is a top priority for most people. Having a brain injury can complicate relationships. Some challenges you might face include:

- Difficulty reading, reacting to and communicate emotions
- General communication
- Changes in emotions
- Feeling may be more reactive or you may easily get upset
- Changes in how you do things that you used to do

While brain injury may change how we do things, it doesn't have to change the things that are important to us.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Changes in social functioning is one of the most common complaints after brain injury. Reasons include:

- Harder to be around people if you are sensitive to sound or easily overwhelmed.
- If communication or how quickly you think has changed, it can make following or participating in conversations more challenging.
- Changes in mobility coordination can make it tough to get back to your hobbies or interests.

Staying socially involved is helpful after brain injury because it reminds us of the ways that we are the same and gives you opportunities to learn something new and make connections. It can be challenging at first.

What to do:

- If the first time hanging out with friends is a little awkward, try again. Give yourself and your friends time to adjust.
- Start small. Don't get together with everyone at once, rather meet with a few good friends for an hour and see how it goes.
- Let one person you really trust know what you are working on. You won't feel like everyone knows your business, but you'll have support if you need it.

SEXUALITY

Sexuality is an important part of life to most people. Things to keep in mind after brain injury:

- Communication is more important than ever. Talk to a partner early in a non-sexual context to clarify what is okay and what isn't.
- Give partner's permission to let you know how things are going.
- If you are impulsive, it's important to plan for sexual safety. Have condoms readily available, and talk about protection early and in a non-sexual context.

ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Romance after a brain injury can be more challenging.

If you already have a romantic partner:

- Schedule date night and make time to reconnect. During a date, don't talk about medical information unless you must. A date is time to be together as partners and focus on each other.
- Both you and your partner should take time off and take care of yourselves. This is important for both of you.
- It can take time to re-learn how to communicate after a brain injury. Make time to practice communication with your partner.
 - Couple's therapy can help with this if needed.

If you are looking for a partner:

- Being out in the world is the key, you can't meet people at home.
- Don't feel that you have to tell someone about your injury right away but helping them understand you sooner rather than later can be a good thing.
- Be careful about being too interested or too distant.

