



FACT SHEET

Brain Injury & Impulsivity

***Do you
have
trouble
with
acting
or
speaking
before
you
think?***

What does this mean?

This involves an inability to control urges that can lead to impulsive and often inappropriate social behavior. For example, a previously shy person may become quite extroverted and talkative if the brain injury has led to a mild lack of inhibitions; they may say and do inappropriate things that they never would have done before the injury.

Most people do not understand that this problem is a common result of brain injury and they may take these actions and behaviors personally. This, in turn, often leads to conflicts, blaming and criticism from others. As a result, some impulsive brain injured individuals find that they are constantly having conflicts with those around them. They may alienate old friends, have trouble making new ones, and eventually become socially isolated and alone.

How might a brain injury lead to impulsivity?

A common outcome from a frontal lobe injury is lack of awareness. This can make it difficult for a person to recognize their problems, to analyze their behavior or to gauge other people's reactions to what they do. This complicates the issue of impulsivity as the person may not admit that they have a problem with impulsive and inappropriate behavior. They may be unable to understand their own limitations or the consequences of their actions. A person lacking in insight will also be unable to understand other people's behavior or motives, and unable to empathize or imagine how someone else is feeling.

Recommended strategies:

- ◆ Be aware if being impulsive is a weakness of yours. Sometimes just being aware will allow you to take a more cautious approach.
- ◆ Impulsivity often arises in situations where there is confusion or fearfulness. These can be minimized by a predictable daily schedule.
- ◆ Use a STOP and THINK approach to things that are known triggers, such as getting up too quickly from bed, walking too quickly, or saying the first thing that comes to mind.
- ◆ Consider putting up post-it notes in situations or places where there is a known issue, like on a cane or walker, etc.
- ◆ Set rewards for being able to use self-control, even for small things.
- ◆ The most common treatment is medication. You may also benefit from counseling. Consult your rehabilitation specialist or medical provider to see if medication or therapy can assist.
- ◆ Family members: Anticipate problems before entering a new situation. Provide gentle reminders and feedback when needed, along with praise for good behavior.

Sources: IU School of Medicine / Rehabilitation Hospital of Indiana TBI Model Systems; Synapse, Australia. Further, the information in this FACT SHEET is also based on a consensus of expert opinion of the Rehabilitation Hospital of Indiana Departments of Neuropsychology and Resource Facilitation.

Disclaimer: This information is not meant to replace advice from a medical professional. You should consult your health care provider regarding specific medical concerns or treatments.

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