

# **C o n n e c t i o n s**

## Brain Injury Canada's Newsletter

It's been a busy year and what better time than Brain Injury Awareness Month to share our updates AND our new look?

We've officially changed our newsletter "Impact" to "Connections" and given it a brand new look to better reflect the purpose of this newsletter: to create a community and provide resources.

In this issue, we'll share updates, personal stories, and new resources available through [braininjurycanada.ca](https://braininjurycanada.ca). We can't wait to continue building connections with you.

The Brain Injury Canada Team

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## **Brain Injury Canada's strategy for 2024-2027**

**A strategic plan provides a clear direction and focus for Brain Injury Canada by defining our vision, mission, and values, as well as our long-term priorities to ensure all activities and resources are aligned towards achieving common objectives.**

### **Vision:**

A better quality of life for all people affected by brain injury in Canada.

### **Mission:**

To empower and connect the brain injury community through education, advocacy, and collaboration, creating lasting positive impacts.

### **Values:**

- Foster accessibility and inclusion for people affected by brain injury.
- Promote respect, empathy and compassion for different lived experiences.
- Cultivate knowledge and information sharing with integrity.
- Demonstrate responsibility and sustainability using evidence to inform policy and guide action.

### **Strategic priorities and objectives**

Brain Injury Canada is a national leader in providing relevant, accessible, and educational information on brain injury.

- Increase awareness about brain injury and the work of Brain Injury Canada.
- Leverage technology to support accessibility, resource sharing, and knowledge translation/mobilization of information on brain injury.
- Extend the reach of our programs and resources across Canada.
- Strengthen collaboration with the scientific community to ensure the development of relevant, evidence-based resources and information

Brain Injury Canada is an inclusive and engaging partner with the national community in promoting awareness on brain injury.

- Amplify the voices of individuals and families living with the effects of brain injury.
- Strengthen collaborative strategic partnerships to increase our impact.
- Strengthen federal government relations.
- Build and expand the Canadian brain injury association network.

Brain Injury Canada is a well governed organization that is operationally efficient and financially sustainable.

- Strengthen our long-term financial stability.
- Continue to implement strong governance practices and processes within the organization.
- Grow organizational capacity.



## **BRITE is live!**

BRITE will serve as the go-to resource for teens impacted by brain injury – providing them with access to education and information that will answer their questions; provide recommendations for physical and emotional support; connect them to peers and professionals; and provide them with the tools they need to feel empowered to take their next steps, wherever they may be in their journey.

[Learn more](#)



## **New free e-course for caregivers on planning for the future!**

Who will take care of your loved one if you can't? Thinking about the future is overwhelming, but a plan will give you peace of mind. This e-course was created to guide you through the process.

Topics include life care planning; medical care; financial and legal tools; and housing considerations.

[Register Now](#)

## **Find your local brain injury association**

Provincial and local brain injury associations are available across Canada and are ready to provide support, information, education, advocacy, and a variety of programs and services.

[Find your local brain injury association](#)





## Share your voting experience

We're conducting a survey to understand how accessible the voting process is for individuals living with brain injury or caregivers of individuals living with brain injury. Your answers will help provide a greater understanding of the barriers that exist during elections. Completing this survey also gives you the opportunity to have a say on how federal elections are conducted in Canada.

[Take the survey](#)

## Brain Injury Canada Connect

Find services for individuals with brain injury & caregivers across Canada through our interactive service directory. And if you provide supports, list with us today!

[Access the service directory](#)



## Free E-Courses for Family Caregivers

Sign up for our free self-guided e-courses for family caregivers all about brain injury, caregiving, and more

[Sign up today](#)



## Danielle's story: "You can rebuild your life to something amazing again"



The past 5 years of my life before my brain injury had been amazing – I met “my people”, I travelled extensively with my husband and loved my job. I ran marathons and hiked daily, and lived a really active lifestyle.

Since I was so active, the story of how I acquired my brain injury is not one that you would expect. In October 2019, I was cleaning my house and hit the top of my head on a built-in safe in my wall. In fact, my head narrowly missed a nail that was jutting out from it's base, so I'm grateful to be alive.

I immediately knew that something was wrong, but since I had a concussion in the past, I thought that I would feel better in a few days. I was used to pushing myself to accomplish the things in my life that I wanted to, so I thought I could push myself through this too. I was wrong. Although I took a leave from work and other activities, the symptoms just kept getting worse with time. I couldn't sleep, I had awful migraines, no appetite, high anxiety and started to feel really dizzy, like my head was disconnected from my

body. It got to the point that I couldn't walk without stability or for more than a few minutes without feeling completely exhausted. That is when I decided to seek help from a concussion specialist.

The concussion specialist I saw was really patient and knowledgeable. He referred me to many other specialists. A vestibular therapist, a sports psychologist, an acupuncturist, an osteopath, and a naturopath who all greatly aided in my recovery. I went to appointments almost daily and did rehabilitative vestibular therapy multiple times a day. 5 months into my rehabilitation, the world shut down due to COVID-19, and I was unable to continue many of my treatments for the time being. I remember being so scared that I would never recover and get back to my life again.

All in all, it took me almost a year to start functioning like I used to prior to the brain injury. A few months after I returned to my daily life I got pregnant and had my child in June of the following year. Six months after giving birth, my symptoms all came back and with a vengeance. So, I had to do the journey all over again, with a six month old child. Thank God I have the most amazing partner who took on almost all of the duties of being a new mother for me since I couldn't. Honestly, I felt robbed of many firsts with my child due to PCS – his first words, his first steps and just enjoying his first year of life. The second time, it took 8 months of daily treatment to recover. I'm still not as quick-witted as I once was and carry the trauma of the injury and recovery within myself. However, every day, I let a little of

the trauma go by showing myself that I am just as capable as I was before, and that the experience shaped me to be more grateful for the life and people in my life. I've become a more compassionate, kind, and caring human being to those with invisible disabilities as a result of having one myself.

The main things that have helped me throughout my recovery are the support of my family and friends who never gave up even when things became difficult. The ones that stood by me meant the world to me and still do. Friends who stopped by for short visits to give me a little brightness in my day, friends who dropped meals off, and friends who called frequently to check in helped me to get through it all. Also, there are so many health care professionals who went out of their way to help me and encourage me when I couldn't see the end of the tunnel. My family doctor was so patient with me, and every time we tried a new antidepressant, and I convulsed (we found out that I was allergic to them) she did her due diligence to give me the best treatments available. My naturopath gave me infusions of extra vitamins and glutathione and got me the best meal replacement shakes that I could keep down. My functional chiropractor took lots of time with me and assessed me frequently to ensure that the vestibular treatments were targeting the proper areas of my brain and vestibular system to maximize recovery. My acupuncturist did her best to help calm my nerves and my body when my brain couldn't. Also, other people who had brain injuries helped me out by encouraging me, sharing their stories with me, and checking in on me frequently to see how I was doing. That made a world of difference.

The things that I would tell myself after I got my brain injury are:

- Trust the professionals
- People want to help
- Ask for help when you need it. Don't be afraid
- People need other people
- Have faith that everything happens for a purpose.
- Rest! It's hard to shut off your brain, but it's so necessary!

People who have sustained a brain injury are going through a very different set of circumstances. They are constantly comparing themselves to who they used to be and trying their best to get back to normal, whatever that will be for them. Be so patient and careful with them. Listen to what they have to say, and don't discredit their experience or their emotions related to it. Try not to judge what they are going through. The best thing you can do is offer a helping hand and grab their hand even when they're too weak to ask for it.

A takeaway that I would like anyone reading this story to have is that although your life may look different after having a brain injury, you can rebuild your life to be something amazing again.

It's going to take work, but you'll be so grateful for it once you've gotten there. Have hope and push through your fears. You'll never know how strong you are until you try. Having strength is essential to your survival. You will get there in your own way and in your own time. And one day, you'll look back at all of this and be grateful for the things it showed you about yourself, your capabilities, and the relentless love of the people in your corner.

## Physical and mental/psychological fatigue after a brain injury



Although tiredness and fatigue may seem like the same thing, they are totally different issues. It's normal to feel tired after work, physical activity, or a bad night's sleep. This kind of tiredness can usually be solved with rest.

Fatigue, on the other hand, is extreme exhaustion that may not go away even if you're getting lots of regular rest [1]. Fatigue can be caused by a variety of things, even things you may think/feel are simple and don't take much energy. This kind of consistent fatigue is usually caused by an underlying issue like brain injury. In fact, it's one of the most common (and challenging) symptoms people have after a brain injury [2].

### Physical fatigue vs. mental/psychological fatigue

There are two types of fatigue we're focusing on in this issue of Connections—physical and mental/psychological fatigue.

Physical fatigue is that extreme tiredness you feel in your body. You may not even have the energy to move sometimes. This can come from muscle weakness as your body needs to work harder to do things that were easy before your brain injury[3].

Mental/psychological fatigue is when your mind feels extremely tired. This impacts your thoughts and emotions and can even trigger physical fatigue. This can come from the extra effort it takes to think after your brain is injured. Common tasks take much more concentration than they did before. Working harder to think and stay focused can make you extremely mentally tired. It can also come from your emotional state, including anxiety and stress [3].

**What causes fatigue?**

The effects you're experiencing from your brain injury like headaches, sleep problems, and stress can cause fatigue. Pre-existing conditions like depression, hypothyroidism, and anemia can also be causes. Lastly, lifestyle changes like new medications, lack of exercise, and poor nutrition can also contribute to fatigue [3].

**What are some examples of fatigue?**

You might feel extremely tired after doing what feels like "simple tasks," like brushing your teeth or getting dressed. Before your injury, these tasks didn't take as much energy—you probably didn't even notice. Post-injury, these tasks can take so much energy, that it's hard to do anything else for the rest of the day.

**You might also feel fatigued after [1]:**

- Looking at a screen for too long
- Concentrating on a conversation in a noisy environment
- Reading for a long period
- Driving or catching a bus

**How do I know if I'm fatigued?**

It's important to know the signs of fatigue, so you can dial back or stop what you're doing to rest. Ignoring signs can lead to several days of extreme fatigue because your brain is overspent [4]. Signs of fatigue can include:

- Withdrawal, short answers, dull tone of voice
- Loss of appetite
- Shortness of breath
- Slower movement and speech
- Irritability, anxiety, and crying episodes
- Increased forgetfulness
- Lack of motivation and interest
- Sleepiness during the day
- Losing concentration/attention
- Eyes feeling heavy or eyesight blurring
- Head feeling 'fuzzy'
- Limbs feeling heavy
- Stomach feeling sick

To find out what your triggers are, rate how you feel before and after doing something on a scale of 1-10. If you know what triggers your fatigue, you'll be able to plan those...



activities better to avoid it. If reading for 20 minutes triggers your fatigue, you can try reading for 10 minutes instead [1].

### Tips to manage fatigue

It's important to learn ways to manage your fatigue so that not only do you feel better, but other effects of your brain injury aren't impacted by it. A few tips to try include:

- Adjust your environment: bright lights and loud noises could be contributing to your fatigue
- Break down activities into smaller tasks to make them more manageable
- Create a healthy routine: eat well, exercise, go to sleep early, and avoid alcohol, drugs, and caffeine
- Make time for rest between activities
- Plan activities around the hours you feel your best
- Say no to people and plans if you are passed your limits or notice signs of fatigue coming on
- Talk about it with others: unfortunately, people who don't understand fatigue can mistake it for laziness. In reality, individuals struggling with it have motivation but lack the energy to keep up with daily demands [1]
- Talk to health care professionals about the symptoms you're experiencing: an occupational therapist can give you advice on how to conserve energy on your day-to-day tasks

[You can see more tips on our website.](#)

Fatigue is an incredibly frustrating effect of brain injury. Unfortunately, no one knows how long it can last. Understanding your limits, signs of fatigue, and learning strategies to manage it is the best way to cope with it and take control of your life.

What methods have helped you so far? Join the conversation on our [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), or [LinkedIn](#) to find tips and help other people with brain injury!

### Sources



## **Caring for the caregiver video series**

Last but not least, we have a video series on YouTube to support caregivers.

You'll get tips, tools, and resources from experts and people with lived experience.

Topics include self-care, setting healthy boundaries, mental health, and more!

**[Watch the series](#)**

## **Classify Moderate to Severe Brain Injury as a Chronic Condition**

A significant collaboration between Brain Injury Canada and the Canadian Traumatic Brain Injury Research Consortium (CTRC) is calling for moderate to severe Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) to be officially classified as a chronic condition in Canada. This move would significantly enhance nationwide healthcare strategies, policies, and patient outcomes.

**[Read the position paper](#)**

### **Foundations of Brain Injury for Health Care Professionals**

Register for \$65

Are you a health care professional that works with people with brain injury? This affordable, self-paced course is designed to strengthen your knowledge of brain injury and give you tools for support.

**[Register today](#)**



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