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## Stress after ABI

Everyone feels stressed from time to time. This is perfectly normal for everyone but can feel even worse if you have an ABI. Stress occurs when what is happening to you is more than you can cope with.

If you have an ABI, or are friends with someone who has one, it is really important to be patient. It can be a difficult time of adjustment. After getting an ABI the brain is still trying to adjust. Sometimes, adjusting to the outside world can be hugely stressful. This is made worse by some of the things that are wrong with the brain. Stress can sometimes be confused with something that is actually wrong with the brain. We hope this section will help you tell the difference.

This section will tell you about:

- **Everyday day stresses for everyone**
- **Everyday stresses for someone with ABI**
- **Specific stresses for someone with ABI**
- **Signs of feeling stressed**
- **Signs of brain injury that may be or may not be stress**
- **What can be done about stress?**

### Everyday stresses for everyone

There are lots of pressures on everyone and sometimes it can all seem overwhelming. Everyday stresses include:

- Getting up in the morning
- Going to school/work
- Rushing about from place to place on crowded transport or getting stuck in a traffic jam
- Being nice to people all the time and making an effort to get along with people you don't like so much
- Exams
- Paying bills!
- Eating properly
- Taking enough exercise

That is an awful lot to get stressed about!

### Everyday stresses for someone with an ABI

All of those stresses can seem much worse for a person with an ABI. Have a look at these examples and you will see what I mean.





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- **Getting up in the morning:** People with ABI have broken sleep patterns. Sometimes they had a poor night's sleep so find it very hard to get up.
- **Going to school:** School is one of the most stressful places in the world with all of those people, schoolwork and exams. This can be overwhelming if you have hurt your head.
- **Public transport:** No-one likes standing on a cramped train. This can be scary if you have problems with your balance or hate being in enclosed spaces.
- **Being nice:** It takes a lot of energy to be nice. Sometimes people with ABI find this even harder and can upset people by accident. This can be very stressful for them.
- **Exams** - well exams are hard at the best of times. Having an ABI can make it hard to study for them.
- **Paying bills:** Lots of people who grow up after having an ABI can find money really worrying. They may struggle with maths and so managing their money can seem too difficult.
- **Eating properly:** We can all go a bit mad on chocolate cakes and crisps when we should be eating fruit and vegetables. Sometimes being strict with yourself is difficult, especially if you have an ABI.
- **Exercise:** It's true, most people don't get enough exercise. We should all be aiming to do 20 minutes of exercise three times a week. A person with an ABI may have trouble walking or aren't allowed to play the sports they like. This can be very frustrating and can actually make them feel really stressed.

## Specific stresses for someone with ABI

After hurting your head, you may find that things that didn't bother you before become really stressful. Here are some things you may feel really stressed about. Remember, it's normal to feel stressed and you are not alone;

- **Going back to school:** Maybe you didn't like school before you hurt your head and now that you have been away for a long time it seems even more frightening.
- **School work:** School work maybe difficult or you might find the work is harder than you remember. Sometimes you might try and 'keep up' with your friends and this can be really stressful.
- **Physical Education (PE):** PE is a worry to lots of school kids. Maybe you were good at PE and now find it hard to move and run about. Maybe you hated PE and find it even worse now.
- **Exams:** Exams are really stressful, especially if you feel you have to achieve 'predicted grades'. Go easy on yourself. You are still adjusting to the real world and it may take longer to do things you want to.





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- **Expectations of teachers:** Sometimes teachers aren't too sure what to expect from a student who is adjusting to life with an ABI. Sometimes they expect you to be the same as before you hurt your head. Teachers might not know what is going on with you so if you feel they are expecting too much from you, talk to them! You'll find they will listen. There is more about school in our school section.
- **Your friends:** We have many friends at different times in our life. They change a lot and sometimes you can have different friends every few years. You may be worried that your friends will treat you differently or that you won't know anyone anymore. Over time, you will find you will make new friends and they will be good friends too because they will understand you and what it is like having an ABI.
- **Your family:** Your family would have been very worried about you when you were in hospital. They some times may get over-protective and you may feel that they don't give you enough space. Talk to them about it and know that it is OK to feel stressed by this.
- **Boyfriend/girlfriend:** An ABI can make all your relationships more complicated. Talk to your boyfriend or girlfriend about the stresses you are under and this might help!
- **Bullying:** Everyone experiences bullying at some point in their life. Maybe you feel like a target; this can be very upsetting. Tell a teacher or friend.
- **Headaches:** Headaches are caused by stress and stress can cause headaches. If you have headaches look at the previous section and it will tell you how you can get help.
- **Feeling tired:** The expression 'sleep on it' means that problems seem smaller after a good night's sleep. Stress can be reduced by a good night's sleep too!
- **Body image:** We all feel self conscious from time to time and can worry about what we look like. You may have a scar on your head and face and can worry about this. See our 'body image' section.

You can find out how to beat stress a bit later.

## Signs of feeling stressed

The following are signs of stress. Remember, a person with an ABI is affected by stress differently so although they can show these signs they might not be stressed. It might just be their brain trying to adjust.

There are a few tell-tale signs and these can be split into: emotional signs, behavioural signs, and physical signs.





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**Emotional warning signs include:**

- Anxiety
- Sleep disruption
- Anger
- Inability to concentrate
- Unproductive worry
- Sadness
- Frequent mood swings.

**Physical warning signs include:**

- Stooped posture
- Sweaty palms
- Chronic fatigue
- Weight gain or loss
- Physical symptoms that your doctor cannot attribute to another condition.

**Behavioural warning signs include:**

- Overreacting
- Acting on impulse
- Using alcohol or drugs



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