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## Doing your GCSEs after an ABI

“A big question for lots of people who have an ABI or some sort of disability is: “Will I be able to do my GCSEs?”

Realistic expectations are important and any goals you set for yourself must be achievable. Some things you wanted to do will be difficult for you now because of your injury.

Your body and brain are complicated and it can be a while before you adjust to things. Over time it will become more obvious what sort of things you can or cannot do. This can be a difficult time and it can also be a happy time. As you adjust, your abilities become more apparent.

When you first go back to school you might find the work really difficult but over time the work gets a little bit easier. You can tell you are getting better at learning. Perhaps you are already starting to do stuff you didn't think you would be able to.

With the right support it is possible you will be able to do the harder stuff and you may even be able to do a few GCSEs too. Remember, just because your classmates are doing eight GCSEs you don't have to. Doing two or three is a big accomplishment after an ABI. The best thing to do will be to talk to your teachers or an educational psychologist. They will be able to assess your case and have a think about ways to help your cope with schoolwork and exams.

You need to have a good think about how your ABI has affected you. The exercise that Mike talks about in the ‘what can I realistically do’ section would be a good thing to think about again. Remember that everyone's brain injury affects them differently and a lot of the problems you have depend on which part of the brain you hurt.

## Doing your GCSEs – getting the support you need

Your parents and school can ask the Local Authority to do a ‘statutory assessment of special need’ on you to see how your ABI has affected your learning needs. This can help people plan how to help you. You may be seen by your school's special needs co-ordinator (SENCO) too. Here are some of the things your school should look at to help:

- **Your teacher should keep in touch with the school educational psychologist:** This is so they know how your learning needs are changing and how you are coping with things





- **Provide you with extra tuition:** Some schools are limited by what sort of teachers they can afford to employ but most schools will have some sort of programme to help students with learning needs or difficulties. Some parents also get extra tuition from people outside of school although this can be expensive.
- **Provide learning resources:** People with learning difficulties can benefit from working with computers. Most schools have some sort of computer support for these pupils. Your school may be able to loan you a laptop computer to write your notes and wordprocess your essays. Computers can help with spelling and punctuation and are also easy to use if you can't hold a pen.
- **Establish a buddy system:** Another problem in big schools can be finding your way around. This can be tricky after you hurt your head. Some schools will make sure you can get around by asking a classmate to look out for you and show you the way you need to go. This can help you learn as you don't have to worry about getting around the school.

## Exam time!

First thing's first, everyone finds exams stressful and they can make anyone panic. It may be that you aren't ready to do your exams at the same time as everyone else. It may be you need a little bit longer to learn stuff before you worry about exams. Exams stress a lot of people because they may need good grades to go onto other courses at 6th form, college or university.

You may be given extra time in the exam. This can help if you struggle with writing things or have problems reading. This extra time is really useful and can help a lot of people improve their chances of doing their best in exams.

## Getting your results

Results time is also stressful. You've often finished your exams a couple of months previously and results day can be really nerve-racking. Getting your results is a funny time. Some people are really happy because they got the grades they needed to go to college, other people are sad because they didn't get the grades they needed or felt like they should have got better grades.

## Good grades

This is a happy time and it can be a big relief. The down side of this can be that sometimes it feels like a competition with the other kids in





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your class. It really isn't but some kids can't help comparing themselves. Passing your exams is great because you have lots to look forward to and can do the things you have been planning to do.

## Not-so-good grades

Not getting the grades you want or failing can be really difficult. You can feel all sorts of things from frustration to just feeling stupid. Try not to be too hard on yourself. It can feel like the end of the world but you always have options. A few bad exam results aren't going to ruin your life. It may feel that way but you will find it easier.

## One thing to remember...

Your ABI has completely changed your life. No matter how well you have coped or kept positive, your ABI usually means you have had a lot of time off school and affected how your brain learns. It has taken a very brave person to try any exams at all! That brave person is you. Think about all of those problems you have had and think about how you coped. It was amazing you could do any learning at all with those headaches and changes. Whatever exam results you got, you should be proud of yourself.

## Moving forward

Your life is far from over even if you didn't get the grades that you had hoped for. There are still many things you can do. If you are having problems seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, talk to your family and teachers. Here are some of the options open to you:

### Re-sit

This is open to anyone who has failed a key exam like English or Maths. Your school can let you re-take the exam after you have studied for a bit longer.

### Take a year out

Maybe you need some time off where you can just sit back and think about the things that you could do. This isn't being lazy, this will give you time to figure out what is important for you to be happy.

### Adult learning





This is great, learning isn't just for kids! There are lots of adults going back into education and learning new things all the time. There are all sorts of courses - contact your local college to find out what is available. Not all courses need you to have got good grades at school.

### **Get some careers advice**

You can speak to a careers advisor if you are having problems deciding what you want to do in life. They can help you a lot because they can have look at what you are good at or interested in. They can also help you find something that is suitable and you don't always need GCSEs to find interesting work. You can get some careers advice or make an appointment with a careers advisor by contacting your local careers advice centre. You can find out where that is here:

<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/Jobseekers/JobsAndCareers>

Or get in touch with Learndirect:

<http://www.learndirect.co.uk>

