



**Headway  
Nottingham**

This information booklet is written for people with brain injuries, their families, carers and friends. We hope it will support understanding of brain injury as well as offer ideas to help manage difficult areas day to day.

## Strategies for Mood Management

**This 'Strategies for' factsheet gives an overview of some of the difficulties you might face coping with managing your mood changes following a brain injury. We are all different, and how you may feel won't be the same as other people, even if they have similar injuries to you. There are some practical tips and suggestions to help to make it easier for you to control things and make life calmer for you and those around you.**

### Introduction

A common problem for people with a serious brain injury is that you may find it difficult control your moods. Small things that previously didn't affect you, may cause you to become angry or lose your temper. This can be stressful and upsetting for everybody. It is important for you to remember that anything that helps you feel more in control is always a positive thing. Not everything will work first time, it is a matter of finding what works best for you.

We have divided our factsheet into two sections:

- Section 1 outlines the ways you can manage your mood swings and make life easier for you and those around you.
- Section 2 is aimed at your family, friends and carers, and deals with techniques and strategies which can help them to cope when you have difficulty controlling your moods. It is a good idea for you to read through section 2 so that you can begin to understand what those around you are trying to do to help you the best they can.



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### Section 1: Adapting to mood swings

#### Introduction

There are obviously lots reasons why it is important to control your anger, two of the most important are:

1. It can lead to aggressive or impulsive behaviour
2. It can affect your thinking and speaking

When we use any of the skills we have, whether it is in conversation, making a decision, or pouring a cup of tea, we can't do it as well when we are angry or in a bad temper. Sometimes, if we are in a bad mood, we say or do things that may be upsetting to everybody around us, and there may be consequences we regret later.

Your brain injury may make it harder for you to control your moods. This will affect how you receive information, how you deal with things, how your memory may cope, and how well you can communicate with people. This can lead to you becoming frustrated and perhaps even angrier. If you already have problems in any of these areas, your anger will only make them worse.

#### Tips for managing anger

Here are a number of tips that can help with identifying and managing anger. You might find some of the tips more difficult than others to complete. We mentioned earlier that not everything will work for you, it is a matter of trial and error to discover what is best for you.

- **Walk away.** This is not always easy, and you may not like the idea because it can be seen as 'backing down'. However, physically distancing yourself from the source of anger is the first step to managing your anger effectively, as it allows you to calm your body and thoughts before you deal with things.



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- **Stay calm and take your time.** Like walking away, this not easy to do, particularly if you find yourself becoming frustrated. Try to take time out to decide if something is really worth dealing with. If it is, plan your response calmly. Then decide if it is worth getting angry over. If not, let it drop.
- **Write down how you are feeling when you are angry.** You can show this to someone you trust later and discuss the reasons you felt angry, what you did about it, and what can be done next time to prevent you from getting angry again.
- **Think about using other ways to calm yourself down.** Simply, anything that takes you mind away from what is causing you to feel angry will help you to calm down. Listening to music, reading a book or watching a bit of TV are easy ways to take your mind of things. You could think of someone who normally helps you calm down and try to imagine what they would say if they were with you. Some old advice is still very good; sit down, relax and take a few deep breaths. A good idea is to try and build some of these actions into your daily routine.
- **Learn to appreciate your thoughts.** Normally, none of us appreciate how powerful our thoughts are, or that our thoughts are completely automatic. The effects of your brain injury may make these automatic responses different to how you used to react to situations, and make you angry when there seems to be no good reason.
- **Anger is your reaction to a situation.** Remember, it is only your interpretation of a trigger (situation) that makes you angry. You may be right, but try and think about other interpretations first.
- **Practice noticing or self-monitoring.** What this means is; try to look at yourself to work out how tense and angry your body is feeling, try and relax and notice the difference. This will help you to measure how angry you are, when compared to how you feel when relaxed.
- **Look out for the warning signs.** Following on from self-monitoring, most of us can work out how we act and feel when we are getting angry. For example, you might feel your shoulders rising up, you clench your fists or start to breath heavier. Now is the time to follow our first tip, simply walk away,
- **Write down which ideas have helped.** If it worked before, it will work again. This will help you in future if you find yourself going through a 'bad patch'.
- **Consider seeking professional support.** If you are struggling with managing your moods and keeping you temper in check, it could be the time for some outside help. Headway Nottingham



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are there to point you in the right direction for where to go, or who to approach to help you regain better control.

### Physical activity

Some people believe that they must do something physical to let their anger out. Whilst punching something is better than punching somebody, there may still be problems. During aggressive exercise, your body produces adrenaline, a powerful hormone, which may prevent the thoughts that triggered your anger from going away. One way to look at it is to think, 'what would I do if there wasn't a punchbag'? Other exercises such as running, walking or gardening may help if you feel the urge to 'do something'.

What you need to consider is, exercise alone might not take away your angry thoughts, and you may not feel calmer. It is essential that if you must exercise when you feel frustrated, to take time at the end to slow down, and let your body rest and return to normal levels. This way, you will be more likely to think things through more clearly.

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## Strategies for Mood Management

### Section 2: Help and advice for families and carers

#### Introduction

Watching someone we know and care for lose their temper and composure, can be hard to accept and deal with. It is even more difficult to witness if the anger is towards another family member.

Professional people are trained to deal, with these situations, family members friends and carers, in most cases, are not. This section contains tips for family, friends and carers of people with brain injuries who experience more anger after their brain injury and have difficulties with managing this.

#### Tips for families, friends and carers

- **Try not to get into an argument in the first place.** This is of course easier said than done. Try to make a conscious effort to be calm and speak gently, even if you think the argument wrong.
- **Walk away.** If the anger is being directed at you, try and explain first why you are leaving, rather than just walking away. This might help to calm things down.
- **It is not personal.** If the anger is being directed at you, it is not personal. Try and remember that the anger may be the outcome of the brain injury.
- **Change the subject.** Try to gently direct the conversation away from what may be causing tension and stress. It won't always work, but taking about something more pleasant may help to calm things down.
- **Learn the 'triggers'.** You may feel you already know what 'triggers' a volatile situation. Instead of pointing out or criticising, try and help them to work out for themselves what it is they are getting angry about.
- **Work around the 'triggers'.** When you both discover a trigger, help with finding another way to look at the situation. For example, 'turn the TV down love, it's a bit loud', is a lot better than shouting, 'will you turn the TV down and stop being so selfish'.
- **Nothing is obvious.** Whatever has caused an angry situation may not always be obvious. It is a natural for all of us to observe and mentally note what makes people tick. However, more patience may be needed to work out why somebody with a brain injury reacts in a certain way.



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Even simple things like watching people chatting freely can bring up feelings of sadness and injustice, which can subsequently lead to anger.

- **Agree on a prompt or sign.** When you think things are getting out of hand, work out a prompt or sign that everybody clearly understands. For example, a simple action like blowing over your shoulder means, 'blow away your anger', and should act as a signal that things need to calm down.
- **Avoid busy places.** Busy places or situations can be difficult for people with brain injuries as they may struggle with processing all the information around them. If you see the situation becoming stressful, suggest you move to somewhere quieter to allow things to calm down.

## Seeking professional support

We have offered lots of tips to help you cope if someone you know with a brain injury is having difficulty controlling their moods. Sometimes things may not work, and it is time to look for outside or professional support. Unfortunately, the person with the brain injury does not always recognise there is an issue. There are a number of points below to help you decide what to do next.

- If they do not recognise that they have an anger problem, try to help them to understand by giving gentle but constant reminders and reassurance that help is available.
- Discuss with them the benefits of getting professional support, and remind them that they are not to blame for their anger problem, it is an effect of their injury.
- If they still refuse to seek professional support, it can be useful for you to attend therapy or counselling sessions alone. You should discuss with the therapist how the survivor's anger makes you feel and how best to look after yourself.
- Remember that it is important to protect yourself and anyone else around you if the anger becomes violent.
- If the brain injury survivor becomes abusive and is at risk of harming themselves or others around them, there may be a need to report this to an adult safeguarding team. Headway Nottingham can offer emotional support and information if you need help with this.



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### Conclusion

Problems with managing moods and anger are common after brain injury. If you are having difficulties controlling your moods or managing your anger, becoming aware of the anger is the first step to dealing with it. Families, friends and carers will also be affected if there are anger problems, and it is important for them to understand how best to support you to come to terms with the issues you may face. The tips in this factsheet can help you to both identify, and manage your anger effectively. Bear in mind that it may be necessary for you to seek professional support as well.

We hope that this information has helped you to learn that your life after your brain injury will be different. Headway Nottingham are there to help, reassure and support you through these challenges.

To help you overcome some of the other difficulties you may be facing after your brain injury, Headway Nottingham have produced a series of 'Strategies for Coping' factsheets.

1. Coping with Balance Problems
2. Coping with Communication
3. Coping with Memory
4. Coping with Depression
5. Coping with Difficulties Making Decisions
6. Coping with Executive Dysfunction
7. Coping with Lack of Insight
8. Coping with Fatigue
9. Coping with Mood Management