

## Brain Injury and Disability Health

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is a leading cause of death and disability in the United States. (biausa.org) Brain Injury can both precede another disability and be an outcome of a disability.

1 in 4

Adults in the US reported having a disability in 2022. (cdc.org).

Over 5 Million

The number of people in the United States who have a disability related to Brain Injury. This is 1 in 60 people. (biausa.org)

47%

Just over 47% of people 40 or older with a history of Brain Injury live with a disability in at least one area of functioning. (Schneider, Wang, et al., 2021).

Disabilities following Brain Injury often cannot be seen. For this reason, Brain Injury has been called the “silent epidemic” for decades.

## Best Practices

Care providers working with people with disabilities should:

SCREEN and/or REVIEW FILE for prior history of Brain Injury  
ASSESS Cognitive & Functional Impairment  
EDUCATE staff on Brain Injury  
EDUCATE the person about their Brain Injury  
PROVIDE and TEACH Accommodations  
CONNECT person served with Community Resources

## COMMON PROBLEMS

After Brain Injury, we often see problems with:

- Attention, memory and new learning
- Slowed speed of processing
- Organization, problem solving & impulsivity
- Irritability, frustration & agitation
- Balance, dizziness & headaches
- Poor awareness of deficits & difficulties
- Difficulty being flexible, poor self-monitoring

#### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Care providers working with people with disabilities may see:

- Looking uninterested because they cannot pay attention
- Appearance of defiance because they cannot remember the rules
- Slow to follow directions because they cannot process quickly
- Getting into fights because of irritability, anger and impulsivity
- Falling into things, often getting hurt
- Difficulty re-entering community because of cognitive changes
- Gets stuck on an idea or a way of doing something, does not recognize mistakes
- A worsening of a particular problem area after hitting their head

“The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has recognized traumatic brain injury (TBI) as a chronic health condition, starting in January 2025. The National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates 29.5%, or almost one in three Tennesseans, are living with some form of disability. According to the CDC, that’s higher than the national average of 25.6%, or about one in four Americans.”

#### Common Accommodations for Brain Injury Challenges

Here are some common and simple accommodations:

For the person:

- Working for shorter periods of time
- Getting rid of distractions around you, like noise or movement
- Taking notes (on paper, in a notebook, on a phone or computer)
- Using a phone to set timers to remember appointments

For the care provider:

Repeating information to the person  
Slowing down when talking; giving them more time to respond  
Giving the person a list of house rules, written directions, or pictures to help them understand and remember  
Coaching the person with the injury to “Stop, think and plan” then act  
Coaching the person to take deep breaths when feeling angry or anxious

#### Tools for Best Practice

Brain Links’ Strategies & Accommodations Tool: <https://www.tndisability.org/rehabilitation>

Symptom Questionnaire: <https://mindsourcicolorado.org/adult-symptom-questionnaire/>

Cognitive Strategies Guidebook: <https://mindsourcicolorado.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Strategies-and-Accommodations-Guidebook-CJ-Professionals-5.6.19.pdf>

#### Brain Injury Screening Resources:

OSU TBI Identification Method: <https://wexnermedical.osu.edu/neurological-institute/neuroscience-research-institute/research-centers/ohio-valley-center-for-brain-injury-prevention-and-rehabilitation/osu-tbi-id>

NASHIA’s OBISSS: <https://www.nashia.org/obisssprogram>

#### Tennessee Resources

Brain Links’ Website with many resources: <https://www.tndisability.org/brain>

Brain Links’ Toolkits (for Service Professionals and Survivors):

<https://www.tndisability.org/brain-toolkits>

TN Department of Health TBI Program:

<https://tinyurl.com/3v5jrdt3>

Tennessee Brighter Futures’ Resource Pages & Training for Brain Injury:

<https://www.tndisability.org/tbf-brain-injury>

Resource Pages & Training for Disability Health

<https://www.tndisability.org/tbf-social-determinants-health>

Tennessee Brighter Futures is organized and facilitated by Brain Links through a contract from the Tennessee Department of Health TBI Program

References:

Schneider ALC, Wang D, Gottesman RF, Selvin E. Prevalence of Disability Associated With Head Injury With Loss of Consciousness in Adults in the United States: A Population-Based Study. *Neurology*. 2021 Jul 13;97(2):e124-e135. doi: 10.1212/WNL.00000000000012148. Epub 2021 May 26. PMID: 34039721; PMCID: PMC8279570.

Disability & Health U.S. State Profile Data for Tennessee (Adults 18+ years of age). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/impacts/tennessee.html>

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