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Meet Cindy McNaughton

Take part in our weekly challenges
New conference date: September 23-25, 2020

Due to the COVID-19 situation, we made the decision to reschedule our conference from April/May to September. The health and safety of all our attendees and speakers is of the upmost importance. This is uncharted territory and we want to proceed with an event that people can feel secure in booking and attending.

At this time we are following the recommendations of Ottawa Public Health and the federal government, and will provide updates when they are available. We will confirm the conference program as soon as possible.

Visit braininjurycanada.ca/ottawa-conference-2020/ for all conference details and registration information.
Interested in sponsoring or exhibiting?

We still have sponsorship spots open!

Visit braininjurycanada.ca/ottawa-conference-2020/sponsorship-exhibitor-information/ to download our information package.

June is Brain Injury Awareness Month

This year’s Brain Injury Awareness Month will be different than past years as we won’t be able to gather in-person. What hasn’t changed is the goal of bringing attention and awareness to the 1.5 million Canadians living with brain injury, their caregivers and their families.

Keep in touch with local associations to find out about digital events, and follow along on social media to hear survivor stories and access information.
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Our mental health guide during COVID-19

This is a stressful time and it’s natural to feel anxious about COVID-19. Worries about the virus, physical distancing and increased isolation from others can all contribute to deteriorating mental health. While we may feel stressed, it’s important that we all do what we can to create a positive frame of mind and take care of our mental health and well-being – and remember to pay attention to the mental health and well-being of others.

For many people living with acquired brain injury, isolation is an everyday challenge. It’s stressful and lonely. With more and more accessible and virtual options being developed during the pandemic, survivors now have more options for connections. It’s important to remember this when physical/social distancing measures are lifted.

To support mental health and well-being, we’ve created this guide to help.

1. Take breaks from news and social media

It’s important to be aware of COVID-19, how to protect yourself, and any updates in your area. But the constant stream of news and social media posts can be overwhelming. If necessary, you can unfollow news social media accounts and take breaks from scrolling.

If you want to fill your newsfeed with something a little more cheerful, The Happy Broadcast focuses on positive news around the world, including updates about COVID-19.

2. Get your facts about COVID-19 from the right sources

When you do want more information about COVID-19, it’s important to get it from reliable sources. Sources include:

- The World Health Organization
- Government of Canada
- Provincial public health websites

For some basic information about COVID-19, check out our article on social (physical) distancing, isolation, and quarantine.

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3. Meditate

It might seem like a cliché, but deep breathing and meditation can be an excellent way to clear your mind, take up some time, and improve your mood. We suggest trying guided meditations – these give you something to focus on and walk you through each step. LoveYourBrain offers guided meditations of different lengths.

4. Create a structure for your day

When you spend the majority of your day at home, it’s easy to stop keeping some sort of schedule. Creating a structure to your day will help both your to-do list and your mental health. Break big tasks up into smaller ones, and write down what you’re going to do each day.

To help you create a daily schedule, we’ve created this downloadable daily planner.

5. Exercise and get outdoors

We feel good when we are active and get fresh air. As long as you stay 6 feet away from people who don’t live in your household, you can go on as many walks as you want. Walking is a great form of exercise and a great way to clear your mind and focus on positive feelings. You can make it even more entertaining by listening to music, an audio book or a podcast while you do it.

If you want a bit more of a workout, YouTube has several videos you can use as a guide. If you’re working with a physical therapist, you can do the exercises you have learned from them as well.

6. Eat a healthy diet

As tempting as it is to dive into junk food, we feel better when we eat well. One of the ways you can plan out a healthy diet and stick to it is by creating a meal plan. A meal plan will not only take the guesswork out of what you’re making for dinner, but it will help you create a grocery list. A grocery list is a must-have when practicing physical distancing, as it can eliminate multiple trips. Meal planning is also a great way to practice your organization skills.

To help you create a meal plan, we’ve created this handy downloadable template with room for a week's worth of meals. You can print it and put it on your fridge.

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7. Limit caffeine and alcohol

Caffeine can make it difficult for you to fall asleep and lead to increased feelings of restlessness and anxiety. Alcohol can also cause problems with sleep. It’s also not a healthy or effective coping method for stress – it can actually make symptoms associated with your mental health worse (Source: Alberta Health Services).

8. Do things that make you happy

Physical distancing means we’re spending a lot of time alone or with the other members of our households. This can lead to bouts of boredom and inactivity, which can contribute to feelings of melancholy and depression. It’s easy during this time to feel guilty about not being productive, especially if you’re comparing your experience at home to other people. But you don’t have to be productive during quarantine – you should instead focus on doing what you enjoy. We’ve created a list of 30 things that can keep you and your family entertained.

9. Connect socially

Public health officials are recommending that instead of calling staying home social distancing, we call it physical distancing. That’s because while we need to stay physically apart, we shouldn’t stop being social with each other. We just have to come up with alternatives. Video chats, phone calls, texting and email are all great ways to stay socially connected while staying safe. Many local brain injury associations are now offering services online. They may not be exactly the same as in-person services, but they are a great way to stay connected and stay informed. Find your local brain injury association

10. Let yourself feel disappointed or frustrated – but don’t dwell on those feelings

This is a trying time – trips and outings will be cancelled, events will be missed, and a lot of services are closed. As important as these measures are for public health and safety, it’s disappointing and frustrating. Let yourself feel frustrated and disappointed, but try to process those feelings as constructively as possible. Acknowledge you’re frustrated, but then also think about how you are going to move on and what positive steps you’ll take. This is also great to do if you’re trying to speak with kids about COVID-19 as well. They will take their lead from you, and if you talk about your feelings and positive coping strategies, the kids will attempt to do the same.

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MENTAL HEALTH

Tips to support others during quarantine

Even though we have to stay 6 feet apart, there are still ways we can support others during this difficult time.

1. Make donations

Local food banks and other organizations are struggling to keep up with the demand as people become more and more dependent on their services. This is incredibly stressful for both workers and community members who need access to food and other services. If you are able to, a monetary donation can help support the community.

2. Support local business

Many local restaurants, shops, and services have had to close because of COVID-19. While this is important for public safety, it’s incredibly hard for the business owners who have lost their source of income. If you are able to, try and support these local businesses during physical distancing. For example, some places are still selling gift cards and some restaurants are offering food delivery. Your support will make them feel appreciated and help them as they cope with this stressful time. You can find some local restaurants on websites like Uber Eats. You can also check on social media accounts for updates from local vendors and services.

3. Reach out to people

Many of us are lucky enough to have family and friends we can speak with in person or virtually. Not everyone has someone they are closely connected to, and that can be hard when you spend long periods of time alone. Take some time and reach out to people you know but maybe don’t talk to very often. Or post in a community group on platforms like Facebook that you’re here to talk if anyone needs it. Seeing those messages and knowing people are there to support them can really help people who are struggling right now.

4. Offer an ear – and some resources

If someone does need to talk about how they’re feeling, why not offer them an ear? It’s a great way to help someone out, and it helps you stay connected with others. However, it’s important to talk about how you feel is well: for example, if you don’t feel able to talk about COVID-19 right now or don’t want to engage in negative conversations, make sure you share that with the person. You need to take care of your own mental health as well. If the person is open to it, offer them some resources with more information that could help them.
Our mental health guide during COVID-19

Resources on mental health and COVID-19

Please note: we cannot guarantee the accessibility of the sites to which we link.

- Frequently asked questions and information about COVID-19 from the Canadian Association of Mental Health
- COVID-19 and Your Mental Health: a resource from Alberta Health Services
- Information on COVID-19 from the Government of Canada
- Mental health considerations during COVID-19 from the World Health Organization
- The World Health Organization’s tips on coping with stress

More information, ideas, and activities

Brain Injury Canada has created informative articles and helpful guides containing information about COVID-19, physical distancing, and ways to stay safe and happy while spending more time at home.

Check out our resources
Each concussion is unique. Recovery paths should be too.

Take control.

Book your appointment today:
info@voxneuro.com
1-833-869-6387
voxneuro.com/locations/
From our series *Stories of ABI*

My name is Cindy McNaughton, and I have lived with the effects of concussion since September 2015. This is my experience and it isn’t to scare you: it’s so you feel normal if this has happened to you.

I was leaving work for the day. I worked as a letter carrier with Canada Post. The loading dock door was left 3/4 of the way open. I was looking in my bag for my keys and when I lifted my head, I walked into the steel bar on the bottom of the dock door. I remember excruciating pain, blacking out and coming to in a crouched position.

I split the bridge of my nose and had a very large goose egg on the left side of my forehead. I also somehow managed to jar my jaw in such a way that I loosened my two front teeth.

I was fortunate one of my supervisors was familiar with concussions, but I had a different supervisor go to the hospital with me. They left to pick up their child before I was seen. I can’t stress enough how important it is to have someone there who will wait with you and be your advocate to make sure everything gets checked over thoroughly, make sure they ask questions about what to expect, resources to help and what to watch for after the person with the concussion leaves the hospital. The ER doctor suspected I had a concussion and I just remember him telling me I shouldn’t drive. For how long? I don’t remember that part.

It is still very emotional for me to remember that day because moving forward, my life changed so much. Honestly, I really only remember the very beginning of my injury. The next few months is just gone.

I had a very hard time with any noise, lights, and being around crowds and people. I was tired all the time and I was beyond irritable with the smallest things. My short-term memory was fairly nonexistent. I hated talking on the phone and it was so frustrating being asked all the time how I was because there was so many things happening with me, I couldn’t pinpoint what I was feeling.

*Continue on next page*
My cousin, who I am so grateful for, came to help me for a week with my daughter. I can’t even recall what she did, other than let me sleep. At some point months later, I thought I would be okay quickly. But that wasn’t the case and it scared me to think that I actually had a concussion for this long. I started Googling signs and symptoms and there were so many I had. I felt a sense of relief that what I was feeling was part and parcel of a concussion.

I saw a physiotherapist who helped me with tracking things, as my eyes and brain just wouldn’t line up and it made me so nauseous. The exercises I was given tired out my brain so much I would nap for hours after. One of the hardest symptoms for me was my memory loss. Everyone noticed that I would say something and two minutes later forget. I used so many sticky notes, but they were what helped me remember. Another very frustrating symptom – that I still have four years later – is having a word on the tip of my tongue and for the life of me I can’t think of it. I can remember the longer or different version of the word and I use a thesaurus to figure out the right word. I just hope it will still get better over time.

I did eventually return to work. I have been a registered massage therapist since 2002 and dropped down to part time while I worked at the Post. I was a casual there for 7 years. I took a three month leave of absence after my concussion, but if I took any longer I would lose my seniority. I wasn’t 100% functioning at optimum and didn’t have it in me to negotiate more time, so I went back and ended up spraining my ankle badly. I knew I needed more time to heal and being at the Post was not going to facilitate that, so I decided to open a massage clinic and handed in my resignation in October 2016. I should’ve fought harder but didn’t have anyone to help. So, I did return to work, but it’s a huge blank. I don’t remember any of the small details, but it was for less than a year.

I use a lot of coping strategies like the sticky notes and the thesaurus. Another coping strategy is letting everyone I know well that I’ve had a concussion, so things don’t run as smoothly in my brain as they once did. I also saw a physiotherapist who dealt with concussions and worked on my tracking with my brain and eyes, balance, hand eye coordination and really let me know I was “normal” with the symptoms I was experiencing. The biggest strategy is I’m patient with myself, which was not always the case. I’m not who I was. My brain doesn’t work the same although it’s getting better, but if I forget something or can’t do roller coasters anymore with my daughter, it is my way of life and I accept that.

Time is what heals. Be patient with yourself and be open with everyone on the struggles you have so they can help you. Always take the help.
Interested in Sharing Your Story?

Brain injury affects over 1.5 million Canadians. Our 'Stories of ABI' bring comfort and connection to all our readers across the country.

If you'd like to share your story, please email info@braininjurycanada.ca. We will send you our submission rules and help make the process as accessible as possible.

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Brain Injury Canada would like to extend our sincere appreciate for the continued support of the McColl-Early Foundation and Dr. Dan Andreae, Patron of Brain Injury Canada.
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Alberta
- Southern Alberta Brain Injury Society
- Brain Care Centre

British Columbia
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- Braintrust Canada
- Bulkley Valley Brain Injury Association
- Fraser Valley Brain Injury Association
- Comox Valley Head Injury Association
- Kamloops Brain Injury Association
- Nanaimo Brain Injury Association
- North Okanagan Shuswap Brain Injury Association
- Northern Brain Injury Association of BC
- Powell River Brain Injury Association
- Prince George Brain Injured Group Society
- South Okanagan Similkameen Brain Injury Society
- West Kootenay Brain Injury Association
- Vancouver Brain Injury Association
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Ontario
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- Brain Injury Association of Quinte District
- Brain Injury Association of Fort Erie
- New Beginnings - Chatham-Kent
- Brain Injury Association of Durham Region
- Hamilton Brain Injury Association
- Brain Injury Association of London and Region
- Brain Injury Association of Niagra
- Brain Injury Association of North Bay and Area
- Brain Injury Services of Northern Ontario
- Brain Injury Association of the Ottawa Valley
- Brain Injury Association of Peel Halton
- Brain Injury Association of Peterborough Region
- Brain Injury Association of Sarnia Lambton
- Brain Injury Association of Sault Ste Marie
- Seizure & Brain Injury Centre
- Brain Injury Association of Sudbury
- Brain Injury Association of Toronto
- Brain Injury Association of Waterloo/Wellington
- Brain Injury Association of Windsor Essex
- Brain Injury Association of York Region

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**FIND YOUR BRAIN INJURY ASSOCIATION**

**Prince Edward Island**
- Brain Injury Association of Prince Edward Island

**Quebec**
- Association des personnes ACVA-TCC du Bas-Saint-Laurent
- Association des traumatisés crâniens de l’Abitibi-Témiscamingue
- Regroupement des Associations des Personnes TCC du Québec (RAPTCCQ)
- Association des handicapés adultes Côte-Nord
- Association des accidentés cérébro-vasculaires et traumatisés crâniens de l’Estrie
- Association des TCC et ACV de la Gaspésie et des Îles-de-la-Madeleine
- Association des personnes handicapées physiques et sensorielles du secteur Joliette
- Centre d’aide personnes traumatisées crâniennes et handicapées physiques Laurentides
- Association des traumatisés cranio-cérébraux Mauricie-Centre-du-Québec
- Association des Traumatisés cranio-cérébraux de la Montérégie
- Association québécoise des traumatisés crâniens
- Association des neurotraumatisés – Outaouais
- Association des TCC des deux rives
- Association Renaissance des personnes traumatisées crâniennes du Saguenay/Lac-Saint-Jean

**Saskatchewan**
- Saskatchewan Brain Injury Association
- Lloydminster and Area Brain Injury Society

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**Download our brochure Acquired Brain Injury: The Basics**

Visit [www.braininjurycanada.ca/acquired-brain-injury](http://www.braininjurycanada.ca/acquired-brain-injury) to download our new brochure. Please distribute to your clients/patients and networks.

Version française disponible
To keep boredom at bay while we’re all at home, we’re issuing some fun weekly challenges to keep us connected and spark some creativity.

- April 27: Begin learning one new skill
- May 4: Get your daily water
- May 11: Do one nice thing for yourself each day
- May 18: Support a local business or charity
- May 25: Make a time capsule
- June 1: Write yourself a letter
- June 8: Read or listen to a book

You can follow along with weekly challenges on our social media pages!

Facebook: @braininjurycanada
Twitter: @braininjury_CAN

Share your participation by tagging us and/or using the hashtag #BICChallenge

**Our quote of the season**

"I can do things you cannot. You can do things I cannot. Together we can do great things"

- Mother Teresa
STAY IN TOUCH

Have questions or ideas? Send them to us at info@braininjurycanada.ca

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