



# FACT SHEET

## *Brain Injury & Depression*

*Do you  
have  
trouble  
with  
depression  
since  
your  
brain  
injury?*

### What does this mean?

Depression is a feeling of despair, excessive self-criticism or hopelessness that does not get better over time and is overwhelming enough to interfere with daily life. This is different than the normal sadness and grief after a loss of some kind.

### How might a brain injury lead to depression?

Depression is a common problem after brain injury. About half of all people with traumatic brain injury (TBI) are affected by depression within the first year after injury. Even more (nearly two-thirds) are affected within seven years after injury. More than half of the people with TBI who are depressed also have significant anxiety. Depression may appear after a brain injury because of 1) physical changes in the brain, 2) emotional response to the injury, and/or 3) factors unrelated to the injury.

### Common symptoms of depression:

Symptoms of depression include:

- ◆ Feeling down, sad, blue or hopeless.
- ◆ Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities.
- ◆ Feeling worthless, guilty, or that you are a failure.
- ◆ Changes in sleep or appetite.
- ◆ Difficulty concentrating.
- ◆ Withdrawing from others.
- ◆ Tiredness or lack of energy.
- ◆ Moving or speaking more slowly, or feeling restless or fidgety.
- ◆ Thoughts of death or suicide.

Feeling sad is a normal response to the losses and changes a person experiences after brain injury. However, prolonged feelings of sadness or not enjoying the things you used to enjoy are often key signs of depression.

### Recommended strategies:

- ◆ **If you have strong thoughts of suicide and have a suicide plan**, call a local crisis line, 911, the 24-hour National Crisis Hotline at 800-273-8255, or go to an emergency room **immediately**.
- ◆ Antidepressant medications (such as SSRIs or SNRIs) work by helping to re-balance the natural chemicals in the brain that may have been altered by the brain injury.
- ◆ Psychotherapeutic (counseling) approaches (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and Behavioral Activation Therapy) are highly effective in treating symptoms of depression.
- ◆ Other treatment approaches such as exercise, acupuncture, biofeedback, and/or support groups can be additional sources of help.

**Source:** IU School of Medicine / Rehabilitation Hospital of Indiana TBI Model Systems. Further, the information in this FACT SHEET is also based on a consensus of expert opinion of the Rehabilitation Hospital of Indiana Departments of Neuropsychology and Resource Facilitation.

**Disclaimer:** This information is not meant to replace advice from a medical professional. You should consult your health care provider regarding specific medical concerns or treatments.

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