



# FACT SHEET

## *Brain Injury & Irritability*

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

### What does this mean?

Studies show that up to 71% of people with a brain injury have problems with frequent and inappropriate irritability. They may yell, use bad language, throw objects, slam fists into things, slam doors, or threaten or hurt family members or others. Family members often describe them as having a “short fuse”, and “flying off the handle easily.” If this was true before the injury, it is often worse afterwards.

### Why might irritability increase after a brain injury?

Temper outbursts after brain injury are likely caused by several factors, including:

- ◆ Injury to the parts of the brain that control emotional regulation.
- ◆ Frustration and dissatisfaction with the changes in life brought on by the injury, such as the loss of a job and/or independence.
- ◆ Feeling isolated, depressed or misunderstood.
- ◆ Difficulty concentrating, remembering, expressing yourself or following conversations, all of which can lead to frustration.
- ◆ Tiring easily and pain.

### Recommended strategies:

- ◆ Decrease stress and irritating situations can help reduce triggers.
- ◆ Counseling can help teach basic anger management skills, such as self-calming strategies, relaxation and better communication methods.
- ◆ Certain medications can be prescribed to help control temper outbursts.
- ◆ **Family members can help by changing the way they react to the temper outbursts:**
  - Understand that being irritable and getting angry easily is due to the brain injury. Try not to take it personally.
  - Do not argue with the injured person during an outburst. Instead, let him or her cool down for a few minutes first.
  - Do not try to calm them down by giving in to his or her demands.
  - Set some rules for communication. Let the injured person know that it is not acceptable to yell at, threaten or hurt others. Refuse to talk to the injured person when he or she is yelling.
  - After the outburst is over, talk about what led to the outburst. Encourage the injured person to discuss the problem in a calm way. When the person feels anger coming on, suggest other outlets, such as leaving the room, taking a walk, or using another relaxation strategy.

**Sources:** 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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