AfterTrauma

Factsheet

PHYSICAL IMPACTS

After spending some time in bed your body can get quite weak. This will make your muscles weak which will also make you more tired. Try and pace yourself so that you do not try to do everything at once. For example, try to spread out activities throughout the day so that you do not do everything in the morning. You may want to have a wash at night before going to bed so that you have more energy in the morning to get up, make breakfast and maybe do laundry or go for a walk.

If you are tired it is okay to have a sleep in the afternoon. Try to actually sleep on your bed rather than have a 'nap' in front of the TV as this is not good quality sleep. Try to avoid caffeine and alcohol close to bed time as this will impact the quality of your sleep.

PAIN

Many patients will experience pain after a traumatic injury which is quite expected. It is important to not get too concerned about this. While you are in hospital the doctors and nurses will evaluate your pain and decide on the best medication for the type of pain that you have. Pain can be due to a wide variety of reasons including bruised muscles, broken bones or surgery.

When you leave hospital you need to discuss ongoing pain medication with your GP. They should monitor your medication and also help you to reduce the dose that you are taking until you feel better. Pain medication often causes constipation. If you experience this you can get laxatives from the pharmacy or ask your GP.

If you experience ongoing pain, your GP may refer you to a pain clinic. You can download a pamphlet with some top tips in managing ongoing pain from the link below:

- The Pain Toolkit: http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Pain/Documents/The%20pain%20toolkit%20-%20Oct%2010%20-%20READ.pdf

CONSTIPATION AND BOWEL MANAGEMENT

Constipation (not being able to open your bowels regularly) can be a problem if you are not very mobile and if you are taking some pain medications. The following suggestions may help:

- include plenty of high fibre foods including fruit, vegetables and cereals
- Drink sufficient fluid with the aim to take 3 to 4 pints (8 to 10 cups) of total fluid per day
- Move about was much as possible within your own limits
- In hospital you will be offered laxatives if you need them. If you continue to have problems once you are home, your GP can give you advice and prescribe laxatives if needed.

NUMBNESS

Numbness and tingling are abnormal sensations that can be felt anywhere in your body, but most commonly in your hands, feet, arms and legs. There are a number of reasons why you may have numbness following a traumatic injury:

DAMAGE TO YOUR PERIPHERAL NERVES:

- This means damage to any of the nerves in your body, apart from those in your brain and spinal cord. Peripheral nerve damage can be caused by broken bones, a traction injury where the nerve is stretched, a deep cut to the skin, compression or loss of blood supply. The degree of recovery will depend on how badly the nerve has been damaged. Your doctor can organise tests called nerve conduction studies which assess the level of damage to the nerve. Once they have assessed the damage they will then be able to discuss your treatment options with you.

DAMAGE TO YOUR SPINAL CORD:

- Damage to your spinal cord can cause partial or complete numbness below the level of your injury including your ability to feel heat, cold and touch. You may also lose the ability to feel your bladder and bowels and know when they need to be emptied.
    - The Spinal Injury Association is a good source of information on spinal cord injury. http://www.spinal.co.uk/

DAMAGE TO NERVE ROOTS:

- Nerve roots are formed from the spinal cord and intertwine to become peripheral nerves which supply the arms and legs. They are most commonly damaged in the neck by compression or stretching and are often associated with sports injuries and road traffic accidents. Pain and numbness are felt on one side and radiate down from the shoulder into the hand.

DAMAGE TO YOUR BRAIN:

- Damage to the sensory cortex in your brain can cause numbness or tingling as well as loss of taste, vision, hearing and smell. Your recovery will depend on the severity of the damage to your brain.
    - Headway is a good source of information on traumatic brain injury: https://www.headway.org.uk/

WEAKNESS

Muscles can become weak due to lack of use, nerve injury, pain and medications. Following traumatic injuries, it is common to have a period of immobility on the intensive care unit, or while you are waiting for surgery to fix broken bones. Even after surgery you may not be allowed to put weight through your legs in order for bones to heal. This can cause your muscles to become weak and make it harder to move around. If you are in pain it can also be difficult to move around which can make the problem worse. It can take some time for your strength to return even when you have gone home from hospital.

The hospital physiotherapists will help you regain your strength and mobility as soon as you are well enough. This can even start when you are on the intensive care unit. It is important to exercise and start moving around as early as possible in order to prevent your muscles from weakening further. Your physiotherapist may also recommend that your rehabilitation

continues once you have left hospital. They may refer you to out-patient physiotherapy at your local hospital, or to a community team who see you in your own home. This will depend on your level of mobility.

Sometimes the strength may not return if it is caused by injury to the brain, spinal cord or nerves in your arms and legs. In some cases people require a wheel chair for mobility or walking aids, splints and callipers to help with walking. Your therapists and doctors can discuss these options with you if necessary.