



THE STAGES OF RECOVERY

"If my brain is injured, how will I ever recover?"

This is a question many who suffer a brain injury ask. Our mission is not only to provide you with information, but also to give you hope. And there is hope for recovery.

Every brain Injury is unique to each individual, as is his or her journey of recovery. Much depends on the location and extent of the injury. Recovery is a slow process and it's best to view it as a marathon rather than a sprint. The recovery process can take weeks, months and even years. Sometimes it's longer than friends and family expect.

Recovery begins immediately following the event. Generally, acute care hospitalization is necessary until the survivor is strong enough for three hours of rehabilitative therapy a day. Most of the time, rehabilitative inpatient therapy is provided until the survivor is able to function safely in the community. For many survivors this takes six to eight weeks.

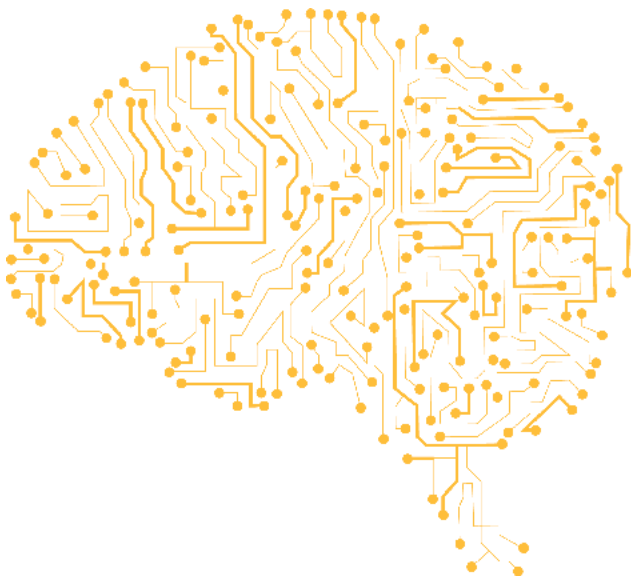
Upon return to the community, recovery will continue until the individual reaches a quality of life that is meaningful and satisfying.

HOW THE BRAIN RECOVERS OVER TIME

The journey of recovery following a brain injury is a long-term process. It is a journey of small steps taken slowly over time. Recovery happens as the brain tissue and other body organs heal. There are many factors that could affect the pace of the recovery process. The following are just some of the factors:

- age
- area and extent of injury
- time since the injury happened
- motivation to recover
- substance use and abuse
- previous brain injury or concussion

When the brain suffers an injury, areas responsible for certain functions are damaged. But the brain has the incredible ability to adapt to this damage by using another part of the brain to perform the same function. In response to an injury, the brain's structure can also change and adjust through learning. This ability to adapt and learn is called brain plasticity or neuroplasticity. In the rehabilitation phase, you will be guided through specific experiences and practices that aid neuroplasticity. Rehabilitation will focus on the functions of the brain that need improving.



RECOVERY IS A MARATHON RATHER THAN A SPRINT

The brain controls how we perceive, understand, and interact with the world around us. When the brain is injured, the ability to do these things may change. You may need to relearn tasks that you had previously mastered, such as talking, walking or writing. Things may be harder to remember than they used to be. This can be frustrating, and it is understandable to want to work hard to regain function as fast as possible. The fact is, recovery takes time! **A successful recovery is not measured by how fast it happens.** If you broke your leg, it would be in a cast for weeks or months. Even when the cast is removed, your leg would still require time to adjust. Nobody would expect you to be able to run a marathon the moment the cast comes off. The same is true for the brain.

As part of the recovery process, you may need to accept that you will not be the same person you were before the injury and you may experience grief over this loss. This is a normal process and is no cause for shame. Often, it is necessary to grieve the loss of the “old self” before embracing the “new self.” Keep in mind that your brain is resilient and has the ability to learn new ways of functioning. At any time in life, we are the sum total of all our development and experiences to that point. Recovery does not mean going back to what you were. Rather, it’s a continuation of life that involves making adjustments based upon present functioning.

As a family member, it can be heartbreaking and frustrating to watch a loved one recover from a brain injury. You might feel hopeless not knowing how to best help your loved one during the recovery process. It is equally important for you to keep in mind that recovery takes time.

Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor (2006), who suffered a brain injury due to a massive stroke, makes the following recommendations for you to consider during your loved one's recovery process:

- I am not stupid, I am wounded. Please respect me.
- Come close, speak slowly, and enunciate clearly.
- Be as patient with me the twentieth time you teach me something as you were the first.
- Approach me with an open heart and slow your energy. Take your time.
- Be aware of what your body language and facial expressions are communicating to me.
- Make eye contact with me.
- Please don't raise your voice – I'm not deaf, I'm wounded.
- Honour the healing power of sleep.
- Stimulate my brain when I have any energy to learn something new, but know that a small amount may wear me out quickly.
- Introduce me to the world by touch. Let me feel everything.
- Ask me questions with specific answers. Don't rush me for an answer, allow me time to think and formulate my answer.
- Speak to me directly, not about me to others.
- Trust that my brain can always continue to learn.
- Break all actions down into smaller steps of action.
- Look for what obstacles prevent me from succeeding on a task.
- Clarify for me what the next level or step is so I know what I am working toward.
- Celebrate all of my little successes.
- Please don't finish my sentences for me or fill in words I can't find. I need to work my brain.
- Focus on what I can do rather than bemoan what I cannot do.
- Introduce me to my old life. For example, don't assume that because I cannot play like I used to play that I won't continue to enjoy music or an instrument, etc.
- Keep me familiar with my family, friends, and loving support. Build a collage wall of cards and photos that I can see. Label them.
- Be protective of me but do not stand in the way of my progress.
- Remember, a person has to walk before they can run. These recommendations will assist you in helping your loved one during the recovery process. But do not be discouraged if this process takes time. Your patience and support will be a powerful force for their recovery.

