

# TBI: What's New? What Can I Do?

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Studies show that 70% of people with traumatic brain injury (TBI) experience some irritability or aggression. It is important to address these issues because home, work and social life may be impacted.

## What is Irritability?

- Tendency to be easily annoyed or upset
- Poor temper control
- Uncharacteristic outbursts over trivial situations

## What is Aggression?

- Hostile behavior
- Loss of control
- Unprovoked attacks

## What are the Causes?

Doctors are still determining what causes irritable and aggressive behaviors in brain injury patients. Some reasons may include:

- Dissatisfaction with the changes in their life
- Feeling isolated, depressed or misunderstood
- Inability to remain focused
- Difficulty multi-tasking
- Trouble following conversations
- Stress
- Lack of initiative
- Forgetfulness
- Tiring easily
- Changes to routine
- Injury to the parts of the brain that control behaviors and aggression

## Can it be Treated?

Since irritability and aggression are thought to result from multiple causes, treatment requires a broad approach. Brain injury patients often participate in support groups, such as BABIS (Boston Acquired Brain Injury Support Group), to assist them in managing their frustrations with their new life situation. Others look to complimentary therapies, such as massage, yoga or meditation.

Another treatment option is medication. Preliminary research, using medication as a means to improve post-brain injury irritability, has shown promising results in

reducing aggressive behaviors.

More information is needed to determine the best combination of complimentary therapies and pharmacological intervention for patients.

## Is There Hope in TBI Research?

Preliminary research indicates that some medications work better than others for brain injury patients' ability to manage aggression. Brian K., who sustained a brain injury in a car accident, has participated in one of these studies currently underway at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital in Boston.

Brian's journey began in 2001 when his car hit a patch of black ice on his way home and crashed into a tree. Brian, who was not wearing a seat belt, has no memory of the accident but does remember the days he spent in the hospital recovering from his TBI. After many years of trying to "hold it all together," Brian found himself angry, easily frustrated and not reaching his potential professionally. He bounced from job to job without ever being fired or reprimanded for his performance.

Through a family friend, Brian was referred to a physician at Massachusetts General Hospital who determined that all of his issues were associated with his TBI. Brian began seeing a psychologist at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital in Boston who specializes in traumatic brain injury, as well. These connections led Brian to the TBI Research Program at Spaulding and ultimately, back to his "life."

*Read the spring edition of Heads Up Headlines to hear Brian K.'s Journey of Hope.*

