



FACT SHEET

Brain Injury & Sensory Hypersensitivity

Do you have trouble with sensitivity to light or noise since your brain injury?

What does this mean?

Everybody takes in information with their senses, but sometimes after a traumatic brain injury (TBI), our ability to process all of this information becomes more difficult, whether it is visual, auditory or tactile.

How might a brain injury affect sensory hypersensitivity?

If it seems like your sense of touch, taste, smell, hearing, or vision is extra sensitive or heightened after your brain injury, it's not your imagination. Sensory hypersensitivity is a major, yet not as obvious, contributor to fatigue and overload after a brain injury.

Pain and fatigue can intensify sensory hypersensitivities, making you particularly sensitive and reactive to sensations. At these times, you can become overstimulated and super-aware of what is going on around you. Sights and sounds that didn't bother you before may now trigger anxiety and the "fight-or-flight" response where you begin to feel threatened and out of control. You may feel like shutting down and not be able to do any more. Or you may feel compelled to escape from the situation.

Common examples of sensory hypersensitivity:

- ◆ Sounds that you barely noticed before can alarm and startle you.
- ◆ It feels like you have megaphones in your ears.
- ◆ Background sounds and stimulating environments become overwhelming.
- ◆ Fluorescent and bright lights can cause headaches.
- ◆ Clothing that was comfortable before, now feels irritating.
- ◆ Large gatherings of people feel overwhelming.

Recommended strategies:

Stress management, movement, and use of all senses can help the brain organize and integrate the senses. This is similar to what children do. Consider how physically active children are as they grow and develop! Try these tips:

- ◆ Limit exposure to avoid sensory overload.
- ◆ Monitor pain, stress and fatigue levels.
- ◆ Try to avoid nicotine, caffeine and alcohol.
- ◆ At the start of feeling stressed or anxious, try incorporating another sense, such as finger painting (sense of touch) or cooking (sense of taste).
- ◆ Experiment with activities and alternative therapies that involve your senses, such as aromatherapy.
- ◆ Meditate.
- ◆ Seek professional consultation with your physician.