

## Faculty Guide **MILD ACQUIRED BRAIN INJURY**

### **OVERVIEW AND DEFINITION**

According to Statistics Canada, of the 10,094 people admitted to Ontario hospitals with brain injuries in 1996, 81% were diagnosed as having a “mild” *acquired brain injury* (ABI). Young adults (i.e., ages 15 - 35 years) are at the greatest risk for acquiring a brain injury.

Mild ABI is characterized by moderate changes in one, or all, of an individual’s level of **cognitive, emotional, behavioral, or physiological functioning**. These changes can take a number of forms, but will most likely include a combination of:

- |                                       |                                     |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| impaired memory                       | difficulty solving problems         |
| trouble expressing thoughts           | increased fatigue                   |
| a decreased tolerance for frustration | poor coordination of movements      |
| a lack of emotion                     | dizziness and loss of balance       |
| the tendency to overreact             | frequent headaches or nausea        |
| depression                            | an inaccurate assessment of ability |
| impulsivity                           | poor judgement                      |

A mild ABI can be the result of a number of causes. For example, a brain tumor, a stroke or aneurism, seizure activity, infectious disease, a loss of oxygen to the brain, or substance abuse. However, the most common cause of ABI is a *traumatic* injury to the brain as a result of either a blow to the head or a violent whipping action of the neck. There is no such thing as a “typical” ABI; similar injuries may produce different effects in different people.

### **EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES**

Exactly which of the brain’s functions will be affected by an ABI depends on the location and extent of the injury. Changes that are frequently experienced following a mild ABI are described below.





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Fatigue	Students with an ABI may find that they run out of energy part way through a long class or later in the day. Fatigue may be particularly evident when high levels of concentration are needed, such as during an exam.
Chronic pain	This may take the form of headaches, neck or back pain, or another type of physical discomfort (e.g., nausea, ringing in the ears, dry eyes, etc...). Students may find it difficult to complete long lectures or exams. Additionally, medication given to reduce pain or prevent seizures can cloud thinking.
Poor motor control	Occasionally, the areas of the brain responsible for the initiation, coordination, and feedback of the body's movements are affected by a brain injury. These changes can occur in a number of forms, including reduced motor speed, spastic or rigid movements, body tremors, reduced hand-eye coordination, or poor balance. Individuals may also experience periodic seizures that involve a temporary loss of consciousness and/or muscular convulsions.

- ▶ allow break periods as needed for rest and taking medication
- provision of extended time for tests and exams. The amount of extra time is determined by the disability support office.
- allowing point form responses to essay questions
- the use of oral exams in place of, or as a supplement to, written exams
- a modified exam schedule to spread out the work-load (Longer exams may even need to be broken down into sections that can be completed separately.)

## **RESOURCES**

The disability support office in your college will have brochures, books and videos available for loan as well as information about local resources.

### Organizations

Ontario Brain Injury Association  
PO Box 2338  
St. Catharines, ON  
L2R 7R9  
(905) 641-8877  
[www.obia.on.ca](http://www.obia.on.ca)

### Web Sites

Traumatic Brain Injury Survival Guide: [www.tbiguide.com](http://www.tbiguide.com)  
Brain Injury Center: [www.braincenter.org](http://www.braincenter.org)