Headway
the brain injury association

Studying and education after brain injury

This publication has been written to offer guidance and tips for brain injury survivors who are considering returning to education.

www.headway.org.uk
0808 800 2244

Introduction

Gaining qualifications through education is a milestone for many people, but the effects of brain injury can make it difficult for some brain injury survivors to keep up with course content, stay organised and remember key information. Some survivors may therefore be hesitant about the idea of returning to education, but with the right support and research beforehand, it is entirely possible to complete an educational course after brain injury.

This publication has been written to offer information and tips for brain injury survivors who are considering returning to education.

The information in this publication does not replace clinical guidance from medical professionals. You should always get advice from your GP or other suitably qualified professional for help with managing the effects of brain injury.

Why consider returning to education?

Returning to education can be a good way of acquiring the skills and qualifications necessary for future employment. Studying can also provide a sense of pleasure and purpose.

It may be that you are considering returning to education to finish a course that you began before your brain injury. Or perhaps you are interested in studying something new that you hope will help with finding work in the future or better understanding a subject that interests you.

Regardless of your personal reasons, returning to education is a great way of developing a range of skills and meeting new people, and can therefore be a very rewarding and fulfilling experience.

Choosing the right course

With so many different courses available nowadays, it can be difficult to decide on what and where to study. Below are some suggestions to help you with choosing a course that would suit you.

- Consider looking for courses that are **offered on a part-time basis**, as the content will be spread out over a longer period of time, which can make it much more gently paced than a full-time course.

- Consider enrolling in a **distant learning course**. Depending on the course, this may only be suitable for you if you are comfortable and confident with using a computer. However, do remember as well that there are plenty of new forms of technology that can help people with disabilities with using computers, so consider exploring these options if you expect to regularly use a computer.

- **Attend open days** at your chosen college or university. Open days offer a good opportunity to ask questions and experience the atmosphere and surroundings of the environment first-hand. It can also be useful to visit if you have accessibility needs so that you can make sure there are suitable facilities on site and find out where these are located.

- Remember that completing a course can take several months or years and will likely **be a long-term and ongoing commitment**. Moreover, many courses charge considerable fees, so you should do plenty of research about the course itself and the support that will be available to you before

enrolling.

- Consider **searching for taster courses** offered by colleges and universities. These allow prospective students to try out to the course and experience student life before actually applying. The UCAS website has a taster course search function that you could use to find taster courses in your area: www.ucas.com/events/exploring-university/learn-about-uni-taster-course.

- Check what **disability support services** the college or university offers. Most places will have this information on their website, however it can also be useful to contact the college or university directly and have a discussion with them about your brain injury and how you might be best supported.

- Check whether the course you are interested in has **additional requirements** such as undertaking placements.

Tips for coping with the effects of brain injury while studying

The effects of brain injury are varied and can have an impact on studying. However, with the right support and the use of coping strategies, it is entirely possible to complete a course successfully. Here we offer some tips of how to cope with the effects of brain injury while studying.

- **Talk to your tutor about your brain injury.** How much you choose to tell them is up to you, but it can be helpful to at least tell them something of your brain injury early on so that they are aware of any support you may require throughout the duration of your course, for example if you need extra

time for assignments or exams.

- If you experience fatigue or have difficulties with concentrating, **study for short periods at a time**, for instance only half an hour at a time, and rest or have a nap as soon as you feel that you are starting to get tired. While it can be tempting to carry on when you are in the middle of studying, it is very important to take regular breaks away from your workspace. Try to avoid napping in the late afternoon so that you do not interfere with your natural sleep routine.

- **Try different methods of study**. You may find that it is easier to study from printed material and textbooks and to make notes by hand, rather than using a computer for long periods of time. Find a method that works best for you.

- If you have difficulties with organisation, attention and concentration or memory, **use tools that help with staying organised** such as diaries, calendars, checklists, and stationary such as highlighters, bookmarks and sticky notes. Ask tutors if you can use a Dictaphone to record classes if you struggle to process information or have problems with remembering course content.

- If your course requires significant computer use and you feel that you may struggle with this, consider researching **adaptive technology** that can make working on a computer easier for you.

- Be aware that **stress** can worsen some effects of brain injury, such as fatigue or anxiety. Unfortunately stress is, for many, a normal part of education. If you are starting to feel stressed, speak to your tutor or GP about this, or find ways

to manage your stress. If you are feeling stressed with the pace of work, be honest with your course tutor.

- Consider **telling new friends** that you make or other students on your course about your brain injury so that they are better aware of any support you may need.

- If you have memory problems, ask fellow students or your tutor to **send you reminders** about deadlines that you need to meet, or mark these clearly on a calendar and set alarms.

- Find out whether there is a **disability advisor** at the college or university and how they might be able to support you.

- If you have a **Headway Brain Injury Identity Card**, this will be useful in a number of different settings while you are studying and also in general everyday social settings.

We hope that this has been a helpful resource. Please consider sharing your feedback with us by scanning the QR code or by visiting our publication feedback survey https://uk.surveymonkey.com/r/hwpublications.

Learn more and support our work at www.headway.org.uk/get-involved.

This information was last reviewed in 2024.

We're here to listen.

If you need support, or have a question about brain injury, contact our free nurse-led helpline:

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