

## Fact sheet

# Behavioural changes following brain injury

Behavioural changes can often be more disabling for the individual than any residual physical deficits<sup>1</sup> and can be very distressing for family and friends.

Society has a tendency to judge an individual by their behaviour, and therefore those exhibiting challenging behaviours as a result of acquired brain injury (brain injury) are at risk of being criticised and socially excluded.

Types of potentially challenging behaviours and associated emotions include:

- > impaired control/impulsivity
- > lack of insight
- > catastrophic reaction to loss

## Potentially challenging behaviours and associated emotions

### Impaired control/impulsivity

The inability to control urges can lead to impulsive and often inappropriate behaviour. This kind of behaviour is usually associated with a lesion to the frontal lobe. This may be associated with such behaviours as:

- > aggression, agitation and violent behaviours stemming from poor frustration and stress tolerance
- > an increase or decrease in libido
- > financial irresponsibility
- > drug and alcohol abuse
- > impatience, restlessness and lack of mental flexibility
- > emotional lability<sup>2</sup>

Inability to control emotions may also result in other impaired social behaviours such as:

- > childlike behaviour
- > self-centeredness
- > tactlessness
- > reduced emotional sensitivity
- > lack of gratitude
- > changes in social skills and self-care behaviours<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> US National Institutes of Health as cited in Khan Beguley and Cameron 2003

<sup>2</sup> Khan, Baguley and Cameron 2003, BIAQ 2006, NINDS 2006

<sup>3</sup> Khan, Baguley and Cameron 2003, BIAQ 2006, NINDS 2006



### Lack of insight

Lack of insight may also be associated with frontal lobe lesions, resulting in either a refusal to recognise obvious disabilities, or feeling as though others are exaggerating their impairments. This reflects a decreased ability to self-monitor and an inability to understand the implications of one's own actions<sup>4</sup> and may lead to:

- > frustration and aggressive behaviours
- > dangerous behaviours e.g. attempting to drive with a visual impairment.

### Catastrophic reactions to loss

A catastrophic reaction to loss may include:

- > depression and anxiety leading to withdrawal and avoidance behaviours
- > fear and anger driven behaviour
- > helplessness
- > suspiciousness
- > paranoia and associated guarded or secretive behaviours
- > apathy, amotivational states
- > poor self-confidence<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> BIAQ 2006

<sup>5</sup> Khan, Baguley and Cameron 2003, BIAQ 2006, NINDS 2006



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## For more information

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