

Speech Language Pathology and Traumatic Brain Injuries: We can help

Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI) can cause speech, language, thinking, and swallowing difficulties. These problems can affect you in school, at work, in social situations, and in everyday activities. Speech Language pathologists (SLP) treat these problems and will help and support you in your treatment journey. I'd like to elaborate on each of the difficulties experienced by many people who have suffered a TBI. Every person is different and may experience all or none of these difficulties and in varying severities.

1. Sensory Problems: Sensitivity to lights, sound, and touch. HEARING LOSS or ringing in the ears. Changes in vision or double vision.

-As a SLP, I would recommend seeing an Audiologist for an updated hearing test and an Optometrist for an updated vision test. Speech Pathologists and Audiologists work closely together, as our job is to promote healthy communication.

2. Thinking Skills: Difficulty paying attention, remembering, learning new information, difficulty planning, setting goals and problem solving.

-As a SLP, I would use therapy techniques to help improve these skills. As we get to know each other, I would cater my sessions to help you return to work, and daily activities that you enjoy. I would use your interests to keep the sessions enjoyable.

3. Speech and Language Difficulties: A person who has had a TBI, may have problems being understood because of weak speech muscles (Dysarthria) or uncoordinated and problems controlling the speech muscles (apraxia). You may have problems understanding what others say, or what you read, or have difficulties finding the right words to say when you want or need. You may have a constant feeling of having a word " on the tip of your tongue" but you can't find the right one.

-As a SLP, I am experienced in techniques to help you with your spoken communication and you're ability to understand others.

5. Social Communication Difficulties: You may have difficulty following conversational rules, like taking turns, and not interrupting, difficulty understanding nonverbal cues. like when someone shrugs their shoulders, or a sarcastic tone of voice.

-As a SLP, I can use one-on-one therapy to help with social communication, and I can utilize social communication groups to put our therapy techniques into practice. In the past, I have gone out into the community with my clients to help them order at a fast food restaurant or enjoy a coffee with friends.

6. Swallowing Problems: You may have difficulty chewing your food, or coughing and/or choking when you swallow. Due to either or both weak swallowing muscles and uncoordinated swallowing muscles, food and liquid may go down your airway and cause choking episodes which can lead to aspiration pneumonia.

-As a SLP, I worked in acute care settings for many years where my primary job was to monitor the swallowing skills of my patients. I am experienced in swallowing exercises to help strengthen and control the necessary muscles for a safe swallow, and also in diet accommodations to help you eat safely while in therapy.

Treatment for TBI- A SLP can help you with:

1. Improve speech to make it clearer
2. Express thoughts more effectively
3. Better understand what you read
4. Improve attention during daily tasks and activities
5. Improve memory using tools like memory books, calendars, to-do lists, phone alarms, etc.
6. Improve problem solving, planning and organizations skills
7. Improve social skills, including reading social cues, and taking turns in conversations and staying on topic
8. Learn ways to enjoy eating and swallow safely
9. Work with other health professionals to give you a collaborative approach
10. Help you return to everyday life activities, extra-curricular activities, school, work, etc.

Some people who have suffered a TBI are not able to speak clearly for a long time. Your SLP may suggest an alternative method of communication (AAC), like picture boards and computers, for the present time as you work on your spoken communication skills.

A Speech Language Pathologist is a major part of the rehabilitation team for a person who has suffered a TBI. I look forward to meeting you and helping you in your communication journey.

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