Brain Injury Awareness Month: Meaningful Ways to Support Loved Ones

March is Brain Injury Awareness Month, a time to better understand what a brain injury is, how it affects individuals, and the ongoing challenges and realities that follow. This month also aims to promote the importance of early diagnosis and prevention, while reducing stigma. In 2023-24, there were around 919 acquired brain injury (ABI) UK hospital admissions each day, which equates to one every 90 seconds. With this number being so high, awareness is key to creating an understanding and supportive society.

What Are Brain Injuries?

A brain injury is damage to the brain that occurs after birth and affects its normal functioning.

There are two main types of brain injury.

- **Acquired brain injury (ABI):** An ABI refers to any brain injury that occurs after birth. There are many different causes of an ABI, such as a fall, a blow to the head, or internal medical conditions, such as a stroke or brain tumour.

- **A traumatic brain injury (TBI):** A TBI is a type of acquired brain injury caused by an external force to the head or body, such as an assault, a road traffic accident, or a fall.

Common Symptoms People with a Brain Injury Experience

One challenge some people with brain injuries face is that their injury is often invisible. Unlike a wound that you can see, or a broken arm in a sling, brain injury symptoms may not be apparent to others straight away. Because of this, people with a brain injury are sometimes labelled as lazy or pressured to return ‘back to normal’. Reducing this stigma is the first step toward ensuring individuals with brain injuries are met with understanding rather than judgment. While someone may seem okay on the outside, they might be struggling with a number of symptoms. The symptoms someone with a brain injury might experience are usually put into four categories: cognitive, physical, emotional, and behavioural.

Common symptoms include:

- Memory and concentration problems
- Sleep disturbances
- Trouble with communication
- Sensitivities to light or noise
- Changes in mood, anxiety, or depression

How Can I Help My Loved One Stay Positive?

If your loved one is recovering from a brain injury, it's okay if they don't feel positive all the time. But there are steps you can take to uplift their spirits and ensure they're kind to themselves. This can include:

- Celebrating small wins, such as getting dressed without help or learning a new skill.
- Setting realistic goals and breaking tasks into manageable steps.
- Offering support but also allowing them to attempt tasks independently.

Practical Tips for Supporting a Loved One

Support from those closest can make a huge difference, including:

- **Doing research on brain injuries:** This allows you to better understand what they're going through so you can provide support that works. We have a lot of helpful information about brain injuries on our website.
- **Identifying triggers:** Familiarise yourself with what triggers behavioural changes and overwhelming emotions.
- **Supporting them from the hospital onwards:** Being there to offer support not only just in hospital but also from home can have a powerful influence on both their physical recovery and emotional resilience.
- **Being mindful when communicating:** Talk clearly and avoid jargon, while being patient and allowing them to process information.
- **Actively listening:** Your loved one might want to express how they feel and need someone to listen without judgment or suggesting solutions.
- **Establishing routine and predictability:** A clear routine with set times can prevent confusion and stress.

At the same time, while supporting someone with a brain injury, it's also important to look after yourself! Make sure you practice self-care by eating well, staying hydrated, getting enough sleep, and giving yourself breaks.

Headway Rotherham

At Headway Rotherham, we aim to promote understanding of all aspects of brain and head injury and provide support, information and services to help individuals with brain injury and their loved ones and carers in Rotherham. Some of our services include:

1. Appointment support
2. Sign posting
3. Information about Brain injury
4. Workplace support

We also can help support these other issues linked here. Also for Future events please view our Newsletter to get involved.