

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF WHEN CARING FOR A HEAD INJURED PERSON

The family of a head injured person often finds it difficult to look after their own needs when they are so wrapped up in the care of the patient. This section is a reminder to all of you about the importance of “self-preservation”:

- ♣ Soon after the initial crisis, resume a family routine that is as normal as possible. Stay in touch with the “outside world”.
- ♣ Always make an effort to express your feelings every day, so emotions and worries do not get too big to handle. Anger and frustrations, along with sorrow, are very normal feelings in the process of personal adjustment and should be talked about with other family members or a counsellor.
- ♣ Learn to pace yourself, get enough sleep and schedule relaxation and “play” time for yourself. You won’t be able to help your relative who has had a head injury if you haven’t learned to take care of yourself. Work out a rotating schedule with other family members for visiting the patient during hospitalisation. You’ll be less likely to experience exhaustion this way and the hospitalised relative will still have plenty of company.
- ♣ Don’t neglect the other people in your family. They need reassurance they haven’t been forgotten and if they feel they are not getting enough attention, they may make sure they do through unpleasant behaviour.
- ♣ Learn to ask and accept help from friends and relatives, even if you know you can never repay all the favours they bestow upon you. If someone says, “Let me know if there is anything I can do”, don’t forget, there are ways they can help that are only directly involved with the care of the patient. For example, washing dishes, vacuuming, bringing in a meal, mowing the lawn and even taking you out to dinner. You may need them to come over and visit and just talk about the weather.
- ♣ Remember, no one person can be all things to all people. You are going to need some help.
- ♣ When a relative who has been self-sufficient suddenly has an accident resulting in a head injury, it can be very hard to adjust to that person’s new dependence on others. Take time to sit down and evaluate what new responsibilities and roles the family members will now have to assume, so you may allow yourselves plenty of time to get used to the changes in your lifestyles. Remember that you and other members of the family will need to get re-acquainted with the patient on the basis of his present condition rather than past abilities.
- ♣ Learn to identify the symptoms of “burn-out”, which means you may have reached the point where you need outside help to get your life back in order and time to regenerate the energy required in helping this person who now needs your help so badly.