



# COMMON EFFECTS OF BRAIN INJURY

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## AND HOW TO HELP

## **IF YOU ARE READING THIS BOOKLET THEN IT IS LIKELY THAT YOU OR A LOVED ONE HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY BRAIN INJURY.**

We are sorry you are faced with this difficult time. P.A.U.L For Brain Recovery would like to offer some help by providing this information about what you may expect during brain injury recovery.

A brain injury that you were not born with is called an Acquired Brain Injury (or ABI for short). Brain recovery is experienced differently by everybody. The focus of rehabilitation is to understand the difficulties that have occurred following ABI, to help restore the brain function that has been damaged, and later to develop compensatory strategies to minimise the impact of these injuries. However, recovery can be a life-long process.

After your brain injury, you may feel differently to how you used to feel. You may have noticed some changes in your thinking, personality, behaviour, emotions or physical ability. This is perfectly normal after brain injury, although frustrating and sometimes frightening.

Brain recovery can be a long and challenging journey filled with many ups and downs. We are here to support and guide you on this journey.

## **YOU ARE NOT ALONE - COMMUNICATION IS KEY**

Some people may not understand what you are going through because they cannot 'see' a damaged brain. This is why talking to family, friends and the P.A.U.L For Brain Recovery team is important. Accessing ABI education sessions may help you and your loved ones understand the impact of ABI and offer you reassurance and encouragement as you recover.



## **PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF BRAIN INJURY**

Some of the physical difficulties you may experience after ABI can include:

- Difficulties with movement, paralysis or spasticity
- Weakness
- Fatigue
- Altered sensation in the body, limbs or both
- Problems with balance and co-ordination
- Headaches
- Difficulty speaking
- Difficulty swallowing
- Loss of taste
- Loss of smell
- Loss of sight or peripheral vision
- Changes in hearing or tinnitus, a ringing in the ear

While your brain is recovering and repairing it is common to feel powerless or hopeless, but there are many things you can do to help and support yourself in recovery.

At P.A.U.L For Brain Recovery, we will encourage you to take control of your own healing. We will help you understand your brain injury, how it affects you and offer support and guidance to empower you to reach your new potential.

We encourage you to take 'time out' to give your brain a break regularly, if things get too much. Brain breaks can help your wellbeing, performance and support your recovery. Think of it like taking 'rest days' when building muscle strength; pushing yourself when things get too much can cause more harm in the long run.



# **EMOTIONAL, BEHAVIOURAL AND COGNITIVE EFFECTS OF BRAIN INJURY**

Some of the difficulties you may experience following ABI can include:

- Sensory overload
- Difficulties thinking flexibly, being more rigid
- Extreme tiredness (also called neuro-fatigue or 'brain fog')
- Feeling hopeless, low or grieving the changes in life
- Memory loss
- Emotions may be more sensitive or easily changeable
- Poor attention and concentration making it hard to plan or organise
- Loss of interest in hobbies and things you used to enjoy
- Vacant/slower processing
- Loss of motivation
- Loss of or increase in sex drive
- Negative, unhelpful thought patterns
- Confusion
- Difficulties in making decisions
- Changes in your social behaviour, such as becoming more spontaneous or inappropriate

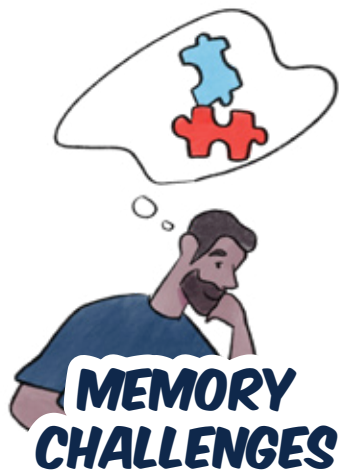
Many of the effects listed above are collectively known as Executive Dysfunction. These difficulties can often be invisible, and it can be difficult to fully appreciate the impact they have on your daily functioning. Physical challenges are often easier to understand as they are clearer to see, but these more hidden emotional / behavioural / cognitive difficulties are often harder to learn about and adjust to after ABI.



# COMMON EFFECTS OF BRAIN INJURY

Listed below are some of the more common effects of brain injury with some tips on how to help. This will cover:

1. **NEURO-FATIGUE**
2. **SENSORY OVERLOAD**
3. **MEMORY CHALLENGES**
4. **EMOTIONAL CHANGES**





# 1. NEURO-FATIGUE

Neuro-fatigue is extreme tiredness and can be one of the most incapacitating effects of brain injury. This may affect you both physically and mentally, and can often worsen other difficulties from the ABI if not managed well. During your recovery, you may tire easily after any kind of activity, particularly those which require concentration or physical effort.

**WHAT IS AN ACTIVITY?** An activity is something which uses up your brain resources.

Simple tasks such as cleaning, watching TV or talking to family and friends may result in extreme tiredness. This is a normal part of brain recovery and does get better over time.

Other activities include:

- Reading
- Shopping
- Cooking
- Getting dressed

You may try to push yourself too hard during recovery in the hope that you will overcome your fatigue, be aware that doing this may have the opposite effect, resulting in extreme tiredness for days afterwards. Try not to overdo it and only do what you can. If a task is very strenuous or has previously made you feel tired, can it be broken up into parts? Can someone else help you with it?

**WHAT IS REST?** Total rest should be where there is no stimulation and you only use one of your senses. Rest when you start to feel tired and take regular breaks throughout the day in a quiet room to do nothing. It could also be:

- Being outdoors in nature
- Laying down with your eyes closed listening to gentle music
- Sleeping

This allows your brain time to process information and 'file' it away, so you're ready to move on to doing something else. It will be helpful to learn the signs of your fatigue and when to rest before it affects you, as everyone is different.



## 2. SENSORY OVERLOAD

Sensory overload is when there is too much noise or visual information for your brain to process in one go. It occurs when more information is received in the brain than it can process. We take in all different kinds of information through our senses; what we see, hear, smell, taste or feel (things outside the body) as well as through our thoughts and emotions (things inside the body). Usually, our brains can take in different types of information and process it, and we do not realise how much our brain is working. However, after brain injury, the processing of information is often disrupted and sensory overload can occur.

You may feel confused, panicked, tired or want to leave the situation. It could be anything you see or hear, and often happens in busy places or when there is a lot of visual stimulation or noise (especially lots of people talking). Although it can also happen during a conversation at home with a family member.

**THE TYPES OF SENSORY OVERLOAD** - Sensory overload can occur quite quickly, for example background noise whilst trying to talk to someone can immediately overwhelm the brain. There can also be an accumulative effect, the sensory overload builds up over time, where information is being processed but gets to a point where the brain reaches its limit. There is also delayed sensory overload, which can happen after focusing on a task. You may feel fine during the task, but suffer afterwards.

**HOW TO REDUCE SENSORY OVERLOAD** - If you feel that the situation you are in gets 'too much', then tell someone if you can, or just excuse yourself and leave. It is important to rest and take time out and allow your brain to recover after sensory overload.

Trying to reduce the amount of stimulation around you may help with some symptoms you're experiencing. This can be done by:



- Turning off the TV when talking to someone
- Limit time on phone/laptop
- Keep conversations brief and clear
- Take frequent 'breaks'
- Monitor yourself so that you know when things are becoming too much



### 3. MEMORY CHALLENGES

Changes in memory is perhaps the most commonly noticed effect of a brain injury. The areas of the brain that have been injured are likely to be permanently damaged, but there is a period of natural functional recovery following ABI as the brain adapts and finds new ways to do the tasks it normally would (this is called neuroplasticity). The fastest period of recovery is usually in the first few weeks/months, but some improvements can still occur about 6-24 months after injury. There are many different ways of managing difficulties like changes in memory and making life easier as your brain continues to naturally recover; these techniques can be called rehabilitative (to help restore abilities) and compensatory (to help make up for lost abilities).

Many people describe struggling to remember names, routines, conversations or places after an injury. It can be so easy to put pressure on yourself. We encourage you to learn to use memory strategies as they will help you manage these challenges. These suggestions may help you take the pressure off your brain while it is repairing and recovering.

Strategies and techniques, whilst helpful, do not offer a permanent cure and no one way works for everyone. Different people find different strategies and memory aids more helpful, so try a few, see what works best for you and adapt them to work even better. Memory challenges can be frustrating, but patience and feeling understood and supported will help you remember better, so it is important to offer this support to the one you love, as well as to learn to receive it.





# TIPS TO HELP MAKE LIFE EASIER WITH MEMORY CHALLENGES

## - **MAKE ADAPTATIONS TO YOUR ENVIRONMENT SO YOU HAVE LESS TO TRY TO REMEMBER**

Making changes means you have to rely on your memory less. You could use a notepad or wipe-board to write things down you know you need to remember. Use allocated places for certain items you use a lot so you know where to find them, such as your glasses or keys. Ensure everything has a place, and everything is in its place. Label cupboards and doors so you can see what is inside, such as your food cupboard or toilet door.

## - **USE EXTERNAL MEMORY AIDS**

Using a memory aid means we have less to remember. You could use a diary or calendar for appointments, notebook for lists, tape recorder for important information, pill boxes for medication, photo albums for faces or sticky notes for things to remember to do.

## - **ADOPT A ROUTINE**

It can be really helpful to get into a regular routine as you can learn what to expect and this means less demand on your memory. Although changing your routine can be disorientating or confusing, if someone supports you to prepare for the changes you could manage them better. Using a diary or calendar and regular verbal reminders from loved ones can help with this.

## - **CHOOSE A SYSTEM THAT WORKS FOR YOU**

Combining several of the techniques that make most sense to you is a good idea. For some, lists and sticky notes are most helpful, others prefer to follow routine or use voice recordings. There is no right or wrong, only what works best for you.



## - **LOOK AFTER YOUR WELLBEING**

Struggling with memory can become increasingly frustrating and you may become angry and at times stressed or feel low in mood. If you experience this then read the section on changes in mood and seek support. Remember to talk to someone you trust about how you are feeling and use self care strategies to support your overall wellbeing.

## **OTHER THINGS THAT CAN EFFECT MEMORY ARE:**

### - **BEING TIRED OR LACK OF SLEEP**

- It is important to listen to your body and rest well.
- Stay hydrated – keep drinking water.

### - **BEING STRESSED/ STRONG EMOTIONS**

- It is helpful to try to stay relaxed and calm. If you are feeling frustrated, it might be helpful to take a moment to stop, take a breath and then continue.
- Share your feelings with others. You can find support and reassurance from people who understand your problems such as at P.A.U.L For Brain Recovery.
- Engage in activities that you find enjoyable and relaxing.

### - **DISTRACTIONS**

If you are bombarded with information you may find it hard to divide your attention. For example, if the radio is playing in the background whilst you are talking to someone, you may not feel like you are listening to it, but your brain may be struggling to pay attention to the conversation you are having. If your brain is distracted, it will find it hard to remember the conversation. Try to minimise distractions if you can. If you are having an important conversation it might help to turn off the TV/radio.



## 4. EMOTIONAL CHANGES

When we talk about changes in emotions, we mean the emotions we feel may change, but also how we feel these emotions may change as our brain may process emotions differently following injury. Many people find the emotions they normally felt are still there, but they are either much bigger and rawer, or much less and a bit flatter than they were before. People may also find their emotions are very easily changeable and more easily triggered; these sorts of difficulties are often called emotional lability.

Experiencing a brain injury can bring up or lead to many different emotions such as anger, fear, sadness and worry. Most people describe feeling most of these at some point during recovery. Changes in your emotions can be really tough for you and for your loved ones to experience with you. These changes are a common consequence of a life-changing brain injury and you may experience them through brain recovery and beyond. We can help you and your loved ones understand these changing emotions.

Sometimes those who have an acquired brain injury can learn to make adjustments for how life has changed and come to terms with the impact this has on them. Sometimes they can experience an extended period of time when they feel a great sense of loss or overwhelming sadness.

Feeling sad after experiencing something difficult is a very human response. If sadness continues over a prolonged period then it could be a sign of depression.



## **THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT SIGNS OR SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION. THESE ARE SOME OF THE MOST COMMON:**

- Feeling overwhelmed by sadness
- Lack of interest in things that you might have once enjoyed
- Changes to your sleeping pattern
- Changes to your eating habits
- Experiencing prolonged low self-esteem
- Decrease in energy levels
- Feeling like there is no point in carrying on or suicidal intentions

(please seek support from your GP or the Crisis/Rapid Response Team if you are feeling this)

It can be easy to become socially isolated after brain injury as a result of how lives can change and you could also lose support networks that may have been very important to you before your injury. Whilst you may no longer see work colleagues, friends or family you may have seen frequently before it is important to stay socially connected for your wellbeing. Many people find social connection through our services at P.A.U.L For Brain Recovery and we hold sessions and activities to help reduce any social isolation.



# **DEPRESSION AFTER BRAIN INJURY**

People can often experience depression after brain injury. Since depression can affect motivation, this could lead to you struggling to take part in rehabilitation and recovery activities, which may ultimately lead to a slower recovery.

For some people, depression could set in when you start to understand how your life has changed following your injury and you may struggle to come to terms with this.

Some symptoms of depression are very similar to the natural effects of brain injury, including lack of motivation and tiredness, so it can be difficult to establish which is which.

In general terms, if you are experiencing low mood over a prolonged period of time then it is a good idea to speak to someone you trust about how you are feeling. They may be able to help you identify other symptoms you may not be aware of, or help you access appropriate professional support.

## **THREE IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER ARE:**

1. Depression and changes in mood can be a natural human response to life experiences
2. There is help available
3. There are things you can do to support yourself





During your recovery, people may say you have changed, either in your behaviour or personality. You may not be aware of these differences, and so it may seem frustrating or demoralising to be told this by others. It is, however, a very common consequence of brain injury.

Tell the people you are close to about how you are feeling and don't worry about what others may think. As Dr Seuss would say: "Those who mind don't matter, those who matter don't mind". Your emotions are valid and important, as is getting support when things are difficult.

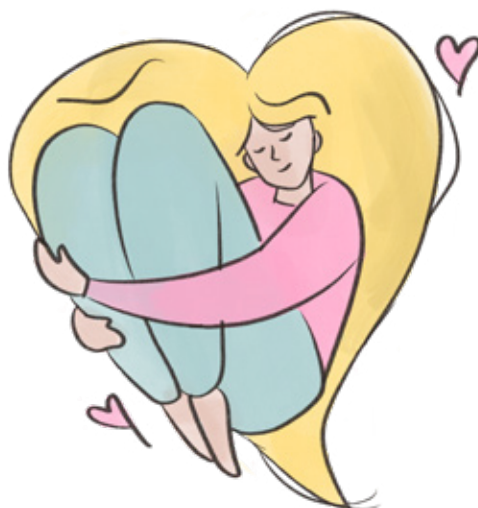
### **THINGS TO DO TO SUPPORT YOURSELF WITH DEPRESSION OR LOW MOOD:**

- Talk to someone you trust or your GP about how you are feeling
- Look for ways to be less socially isolated
- Look for an activity you may enjoy and try it
- Look after your lifestyle choices – stay hydrated, avoid alcohol, ensure you rest appropriately and eat a balanced diet
- Take gentle exercise if you are able to
- Identify any additional factors that may be impacting on your mood and ask for help to address them, such as relationship difficulties or financial struggles
- Think about trying mindfulness or meditation if you are able to - a therapist can support you with this
- Learn more about your brain injury - sometimes understanding more can help you come to terms with your experience which, in turn, could help you manage your mood changes



# SELF CARE – WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOURSELF

- Remember that looking after yourself is really important to support your recovery
- Keep hydrated - drink plenty of water
- Eat a healthy diet, limiting sugar and processed food
- Do not drink alcohol, it slows down brain recovery and increases the risk of having epileptic seizures
- Take regular breaks away from all forms of stimulation
- Take daily exercise if you can
- Take time out in nature and fresh air
- Practice mindfulness or meditation
- Be kind to yourself - negativity inhibits your progress
- Celebrate your achievements, no matter how small
- Be patient - brain recovery is a process, there is no quick fix
- Remember that communication is key - not everyone will know what you are going through but may understand better if you can explain



## **THERE IS HELP AVAILABLE**

There are different kinds of professionals who are trained to support people who are struggling with changes in emotion and depression. You may have access to a Clinical Neuropsychologist who specialises in understanding brain injury and associated difficulties. Counsellors and psychotherapists that have an understanding of brain injury can also be a great support to those experiencing low mood and depression. Working together with them can help you understand what is causing your emotional struggles and together you can look at how to best support you into finding a new way of being in the world.

### **REMEMBER:**

It is important to remember that whilst most of the visible recovery will happen in the earlier stages, recovery continues for months or years after injury. How you feel now may not be how you feel in time. With the right kind of support, most people can improve and learn to manage their changes in mood.



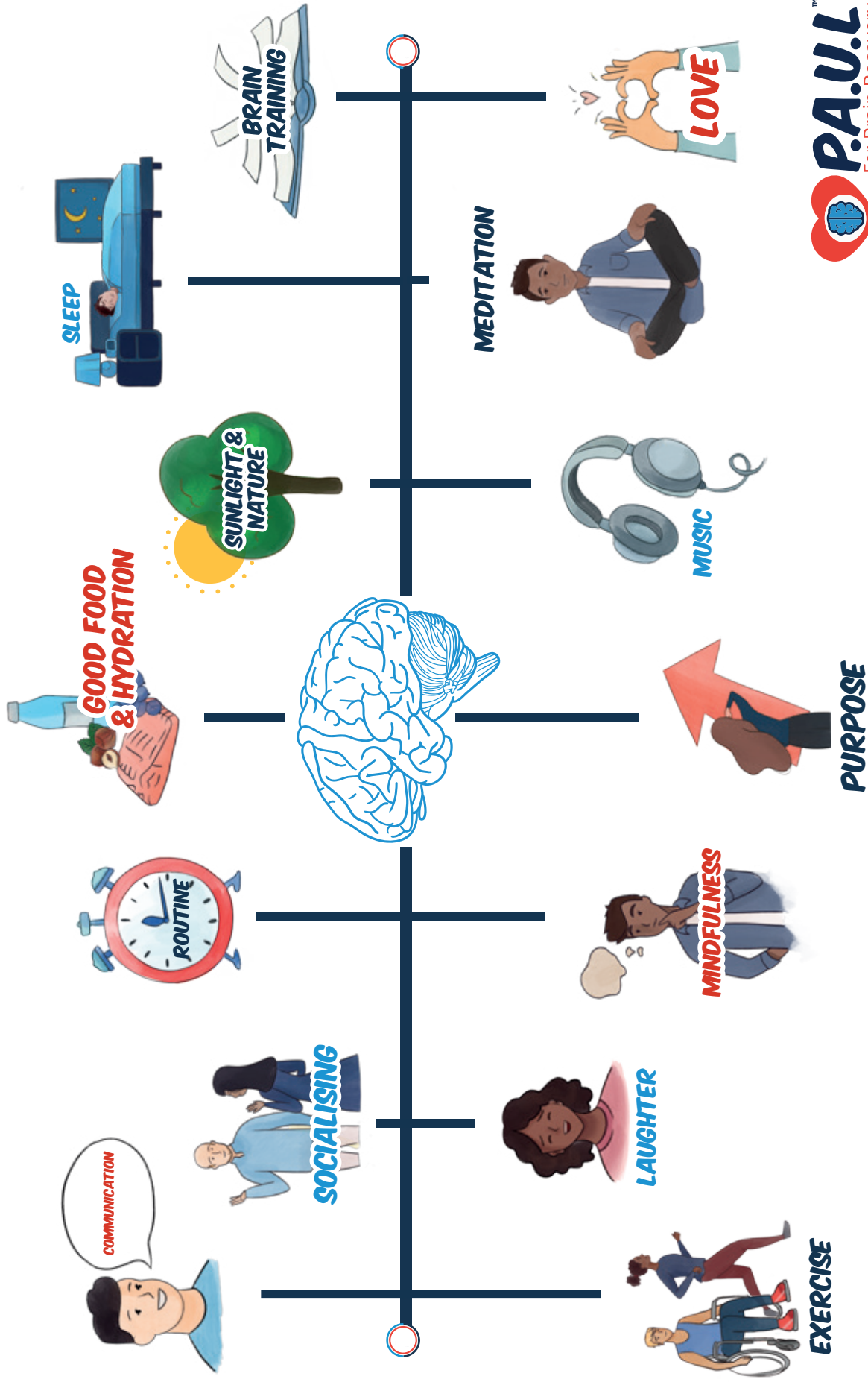
**YOU**  
are not

**ALONE**

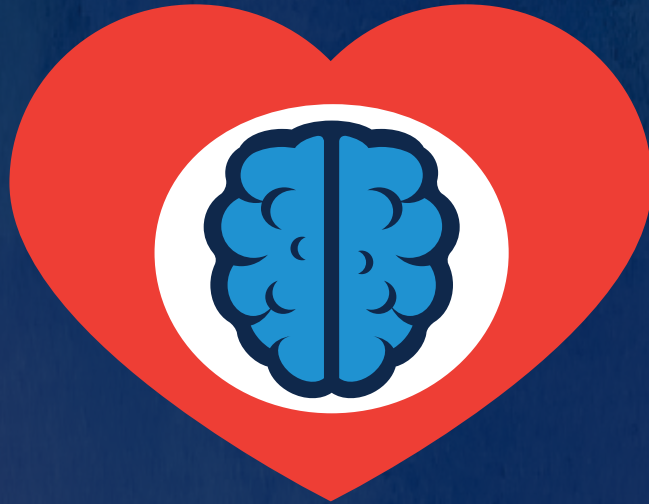
The P.A.U.L For Brain Recovery team are here to offer you support and guidance at any stage of your recovery



# YOUR BRAIN WORKS WELL WITH...







# P.A.U.L<sup>TM</sup>

For Brain Recovery

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[www.paulforbrainrecovery.co.uk](http://www.paulforbrainrecovery.co.uk)

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Charity Registration Number: 1164620





## OFFERING HOPE TO INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES AFFECTED BY BRAIN INJURY

The P.A.U.L For Brain Recovery centre is an access point in the community offering support and guidance sessions that are designed to aid recovery and help the individual reach their new potential.

We support each individual differently based on their difficulties and work towards any aspirations they would like to achieve.

Our sessions aim to minimise the long-term impact of brain injury and ultimately help offer people hope for a brighter future.

**P.A.U.L FOR BRAIN RECOVERY CENTRE  
WILBERFORCE HEALTH CENTRE  
6 - 10 STORY STREET, HULL  
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