

You Can Work After Brain Injury: Improving your Employment Success

*A Resource for Individuals who have Experienced a Brain Injury and want to
Continue or Pursue Work*

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Disability Employment Technical Assistance Center-TBI-1

Overview

Jobs come in all shapes and sizes. Success with work is based on a good match of your skills and abilities with activities in the right environment. Brain injury can affect how you think, learn, remember, move, act, and feel. Your skills and challenges are unique and might impact finding the best job for you. There are resources to help you in your job search as well as continued support on your job. The first step is figuring out your needs, asking for support, and then knowing what resources are available to help you.



Exhibit 1. Benefits of Work

| Work provides us with... | | | |
|--|--------------|----------------------------|--|
| A Sense of Pride & Purpose, and the Satisfaction of Contributing | Independence | Money & Financial Security | Friends, Colleagues, and Community Relationships |

Starting or Returning to Work

After brain injury, it might be possible to return to a former job with or without support. If that is not possible, you might pursue work in a different setting. Think about working for a new company or even going back to school for a while to learn a new skill.

If you were not working before your brain injury, you can explore work just like anyone else preparing to enter the workforce. You might even have a skill that is in demand and could go into business on your own. There are many ways to be employed -- find out what fits for you!

Preparing for Employment

Brain injury challenges can sometimes affect:

- ⇒ Training
- ⇒ Searching for a job
- ⇒ Interviewing
- ⇒ Starting a job and learning tasks
- ⇒ Staying employed

Accommodations are supports based on your needs. They can help you succeed before, during, or after getting a job. It is important to know what to ask for and who to ask. There are many resources for people with brain injuries to learn about accommodations.



Did you know that there are options to “practice” work through a temporary or part-time job?

You might think about volunteering or trying a “work-based learning experience” before moving into paid employment. This may be helpful if you are worried about stress and fatigue. If you were working on a college degree or other skill training before your injury, you might consider starting with a light course load or even enrolling in a class without credit. Classroom support is available through campus disability services.

How to Get Started

Let those who help and care about you know you want to work. Many people with brain injuries find that a great place to start is their [state or local Vocational Rehabilitation office](#). Need help working with your local Vocational Rehabilitation program? You can always contact your local [Protection & Advocacy or Client Assistance Program](#).

“I know it may be a journey to go to or return to work, and I know I may need help along the way. There are programs that can help me, and I want to get started finding out about how I can get a job I will enjoy.”

If you are receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI), check out the [Employment Networks](#) in your area. These networks help people with SSDI and SSI use their “Ticket to Work” career development program. Also, your [local workforce center](#) is a place to visit if you don’t need a lot of support.



Service Approaches You May Not Know About

You might believe your injury prevents you from ever going back to work. This is rarely the case. Many unique approaches for helping workers overcome hurdles exist; these are just a few:

Exhibit 2. Representative Sample of Unique Strategies for Supporting People with TBI to Achieve & Maintain Employment

- **Discovery:** Ask your employment provider about “Discovery” services to help you consider the strengths you have to offer an employer.
- **Supported or Customized Employment:** You can receive extra help as you begin to work through an option called “[supported employment](#)” or “[customized employment](#)”. Ask your employment provider to tell you more.
- **Accommodations & Assistive Technology:** Equipment, smartphone applications, or other accommodations can help you manage your symptoms or challenges. Check out the many accommodation options at the [Job Accommodations Network](#), or www.askjan.org.
- **Small Business, Entrepreneurship, and Self-Employment:** Using your talents and skills as a [small business owner, entrepreneur](#), or becoming [self-employed](#) might help you manage your brain injury needs.

Understand How Your Benefits Work

You may fear that if you go back to work, you will lose all your benefits. There are experts in every state to help you learn what to expect and how to plan. A benefits counselor can help you understand the impact work may have on your public benefits. They show you how you can decrease your need for assistance. They can explain your options for maintaining health insurance, even if cash benefits go away. You can ask about “Work Incentives Planning and Assistance” or available “Benefits Counselors” at your [state or local Vocational Rehabilitation office](#). An Employment Network can point you in the right direction to find a benefits counselor.

Accommodations That Help:

Here are a few examples of work-related challenges and practical solutions. Remember, this is just a starting point; there are many more solutions to match your needs.

Exhibit 3. Troubleshooting Challenges to Employment – Possible Solutions

| Challenge | Related to | Possible Solutions |
|--|--|---|
| Working with other people makes it hard for me to stay focused | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Memory• Attention• Fatigue | Reduce visual and auditory distractions. Silence your cell phone, use ear protection or noise cancelling headphones. Work in a separate space, avoid busy meeting spaces. Avoid side conversations, chaotic situations. |
| I have a hard time staying on topic during an interview | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attention | Take notes. Ask for information in writing and in advance so you can review. Practice your responses to potential questions with someone. |



| Challenge | Related to | Possible Solutions |
|--|--|--|
| It is difficult juggling a lot of tasks at one time | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processing • Attention | Look for jobs with fewer tasks or jobs that allow you to complete one task at a time. Break down tasks into smaller chunks you can tackle more easily. |
| I am tired in the afternoons | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatigue | Consider morning shifts only. Ask for afternoon breaks. Spend time in a quiet room. |
| The light is too bright; it gives me a headache. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision • Fatigue | Work in a setting with natural light. Substitute fluorescent lights for incandescent lighting. Utilize monitor filters. |
| I have difficulty remembering all the things I need to do in a workday. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory • Processing | Use a calendar, planner, sticky notes, a phone timer. Keep notes on your computer or phone. Review tasks throughout the day. |
| I have difficulty finishing all the things I need to in a workday. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatigue • Processing • Attention | Use a calendar, planner, sticky notes, a phone timer. Keep notes on your computer or phone. Outline your tasks and number in terms of priority. Review throughout the day. |
| I get frustrated quickly with customers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatigue • Processing • Impulsivity | Avoid jobs with excessive customer or even coworker interaction. Take breaks throughout the day away from the public. Work during the parts of the day when you are less tired. |
| I struggle to stay calm sometimes and feel overwhelmed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatigue • Processing • Impulsivity | Avoid jobs that might contribute to these feelings. Recognize what “pushes your buttons”. Take frequent breaks, reduce meetings, and check in with a job coach or coworker throughout the day. |

Moving Forward – Quick List of Resources

Finding a job or returning to work after acquiring a brain injury can feel overwhelming. But you aren’t alone – there are several organizations and resources out there to help you get back on the career path. Below, we’ve compiled some of the resources mentioned in this document so you have a quick list to help you get on your way.

- [American Job Centers](#)
- [Job Accommodation Network](#)
- [Protection & Advocacy and Client Assistance Programs](#)
- [Ticket to Work – Employment Networks](#)
- [Self-Employment & Entrepreneurship](#)
- [State and local Vocational Rehabilitation Programs](#)

