

# Post Traumatic Amnesia (PTA)

**PTA is a stage of recovery after a traumatic brain injury when a person has emerged from loss of consciousness or a coma.**

During this time a person may be slightly or fully conscious but confused and disoriented. The person may not be fully aware of the cause of their injury, where they are, or what is happening to them. They may also have difficulty remembering day to day events.

## What are the signs of PTA?

A person experiencing PTA may present with one or more of the following signs:

- Confusion
- Disorientation to time, place and personal information
- Agitation, irritability, restlessness, pacing and wandering
- Unreliable day to day memory, with repetitive questioning
- Reduced attention and concentration
- Physical or verbal aggression
- Very sensitive to over-stimulation, e.g. noise
- Reduced self-awareness, insight and judgement, e.g. they may not be aware of why they are in hospital, and may want to leave the hospital
- Impulsiveness and reduced safety awareness
- Confabulation – making up stories for things they cannot remember
- Lack of initiative – unable to start tasks without someone prompting them
- Difficulty planning and problem solving
- Altered mood / emotional state, e.g. crying or overly happy
- Inappropriate social behaviour, e.g. making inappropriate comments / gestures, sometimes of a sexual nature.
- Fear and paranoia
- Altered sleeping patterns
- Easily tired.

These symptoms may be very obvious or quite subtle. Each person is different and one or more of these symptoms can be present at the same time.

## How can you manage PTA symptoms?

PTA symptoms can be distressing for family members, friends and / or carers. The following ideas may be helpful to assist a person in PTA:

- Reduce noise and stimulation

- Create and maintain a safe, secure and familiar environment.
- Allow the person to rest when needed. Often they need more sleep than usual.
- Limit the number of visitors to one or two at a time, and keep visiting periods short
- Keep instructions simple and clear and allow time for the person to respond.
- Use familiar objects such as family photos, favourite pictures, soft toys and music, to reassure and reorientate the person.
- If the person becomes upset when you talk to them, do not argue with them. Stay calm and try to change the subject, or stop the conversation and allow time for rest.
- The person may be able to leave the ward with family for short periods of time, but must always be supervised. Discuss with the treating team before doing so.
- PTA can remain for a lengthy period of time. Some families keep a diary of events or take photos of their loved one during this period. This may help to explain what has happened to them.

## How can PTA be improved?

- Only time can improve the symptoms of PTA as the brain itself recovers. PTA may vary in time and depends on the amount of injury to the brain.
- During the recovery period, the Occupational Therapist and Nurses will carry out a daily test called the Westmead Post Traumatic Amnesia Scale. This assessment monitors improvements and emergence from PTA.
- During testing, the person is not allowed to write down the memory items, and they are not allowed to be practiced between testing. As a general rule, people will stay in hospital until their symptoms of PTA resolve.
- Some people have ongoing problems with their other thinking skills after they come out of PTA. If the person has PTA symptoms for a lengthy period of time, they may need to go to rehabilitation. Alternatively, some people may be discharged home with follow-up arranged by the Occupational Therapist.

## Summary

- PTA is common after having a traumatic brain injury and usually resolves with time. A person is generally not responsible for their actions, behaviour or decisions when they are in PTA.
- PTA is said to be resolved when they become orientated and show reliable memory for day to day.

**Please contact your Occupational Therapist if you have any queries or concerns.**

**Occupational Therapist:** \_\_\_\_\_

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