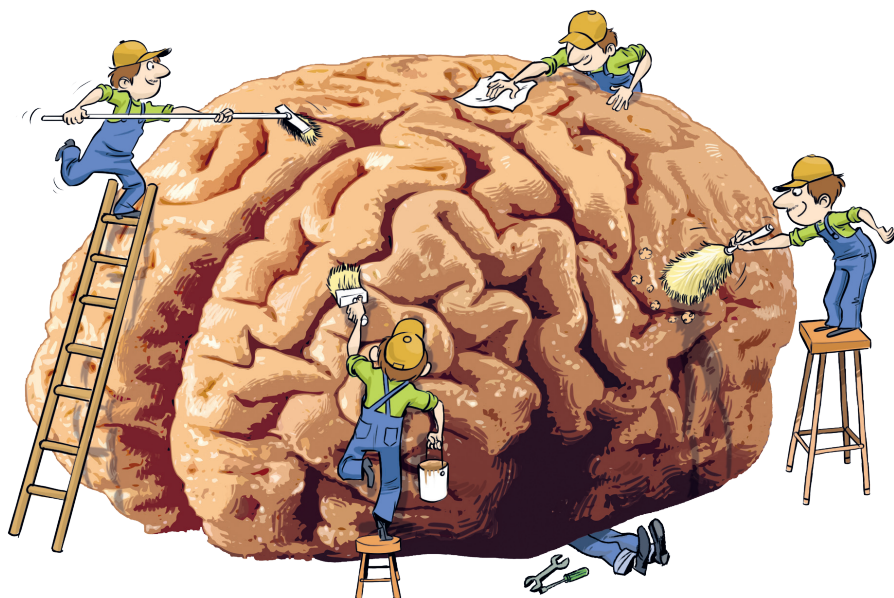


Brain-Healing First Aid

How to Recover My Brain's Abilities
during Addiction Treatment



Brain-Healing First Aid

**How to Recover My Brain's Abilities
during Addiction Treatment**

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Preface

The brain disease of addiction (and long-term substance abuse) results in many symptoms. Much of the time, if left untreated, these diminished brain functions can progress into a number of inevitably debilitating conditions. Our brain is the control center for essentially every function needed to perform daily tasks and the control center for our body and all its organs. We often take this truth (and our brain health) for granted. Even after years of neglect and abuse; however, our brain and the numerous functions previously available to us (many we may have lost in addiction) can be restored.

Brain Awareness Recovery Initiative (BARI) is a collaborative project created to produce and distribute educational materials designed to help the person in early addiction recovery identify areas of need for intervention and track progress achieved in brain function restoration. An important goal may be to build a solid foundation in all facets of recovery. BARI is a tool, one of many resources a person challenged by addiction needs to sustain long-term recovery.

“Brain-Healing First Aid: How to Recover my Brain’s Abilities during Addition Treatment” and our three poster series, as

our first productions in the BARI can offer identification of problem areas, new insight, helpful suggestions, and specific brain exercises for healing to help you put more “tools in your toolbox” to assist in creating a sustainable recovery plan. Not every area and/or suggestion will fit everyone. We have used numerous resources to come up with common brain function deficits experienced by a majority of people negatively affected by substance abuse and addiction.

We hope you find our posters and the contents of “Brain Healing First Aid” to be useful “go-to” resources in your recovery. If you have any questions, feedback or suggestions, we would love to hear from you. Please send you emails to BARI@LIBR.net or post on our webpage: www.BARI.LaureateInstitute.org In the meantime, we wish you the best on your journey in recovery.

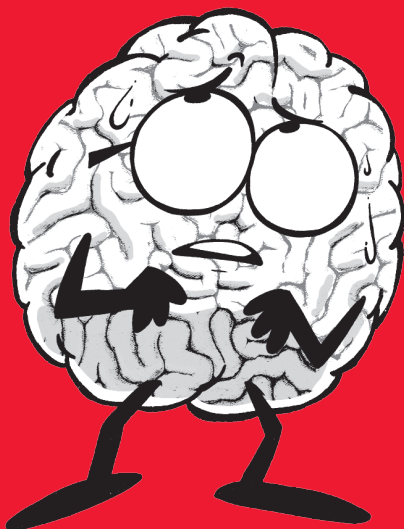
Tips on How to Use this Book

This is our companion book to our Brain Awareness Recovery Initiative (BARI) posters. Poster 1 (of our 3 BARI posters) identifies 10 main areas of brain functions compromised in substance abuse and addiction. Poster 2 offers general suggestions about new attitudes and healthier habits you can adopt to lay a strong foundation for your brain-healing and recovery. Poster three outlines detailed brain exercises, specific to the identified areas of the brain which are likely to need function restoration or improvement. All of the poster strategies are reiterated in our companion book. Using “Brain Healing First-Aid...” to complement the posters and document tasks you have completed and writing down the results can help you build a strong habit association with brain exercises and sustained recovery. Also, tracking your brain-healing progress can create optimism and confidence for you to be able to perform tasks, regulate emotions and drug craving, over which you may have lost control in addiction.

This book will not provide you everything that you need during the process of brain recovery but it can offer you with a very good starting point.

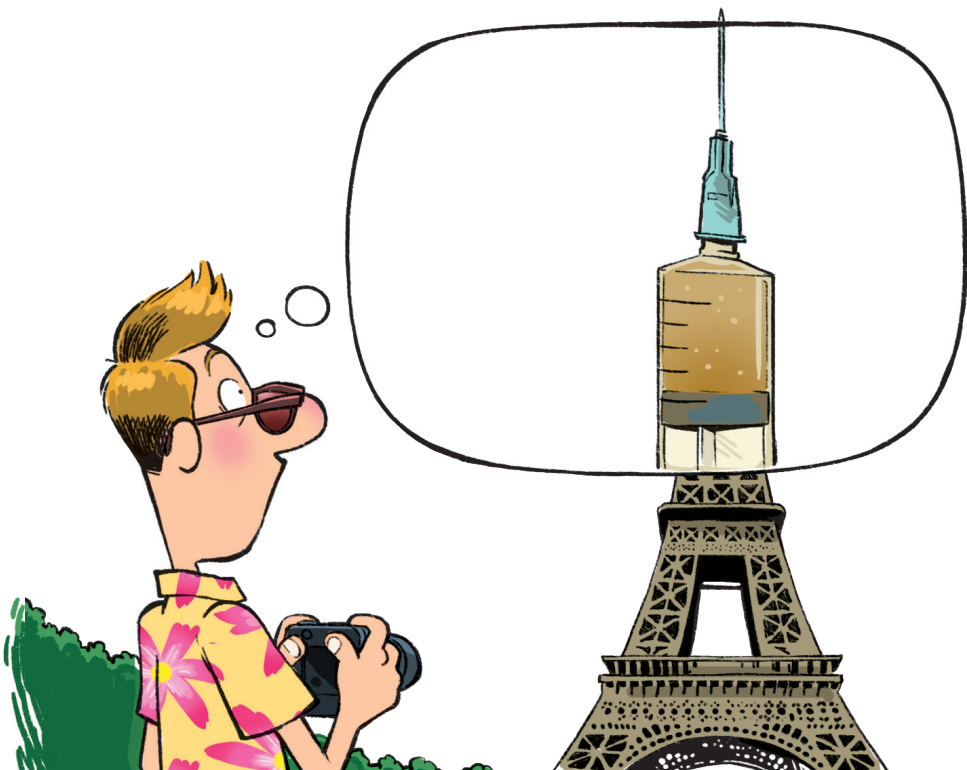
Use this book to chronicle your progress and reward yourself, in different, healthy ways for a job well done. You are worth your own effort to heal!

10 Brain Functions Injured by Alcohol & Other Drugs



Attention

I often experience that environmental triggers can produce an inability in me to control my desire to use my drug of preference, even when I do not want to use because using is all I can think about. When this happens, I have very little ability to shift my focus to anything else. Even carrying-on a conversation with someone is very difficult when I am locked-on to thinking about using. Multi-tasking of any kind is nearly impossible when I am pulled into thinking about drug use when driven by environmental cues.



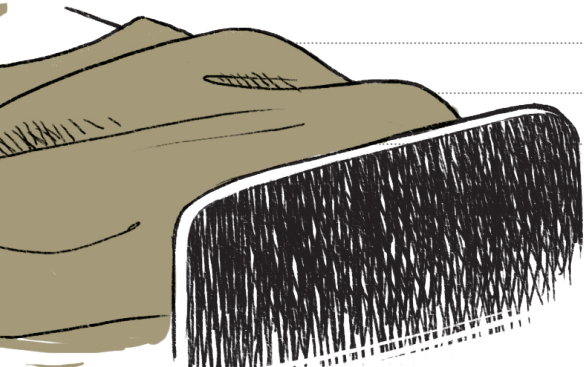
Memory

I believe my memory has been negatively affected by my drug use. I seem to experience “involuntary” memories related to my using such as when I pass by or think about places where I would use. I am experiencing lapses in short-term memory, forgetting things as recent as what I have for lunch or if I returned a phone call. I feel like this may cause others to lose trust in me.



What are the other aspects of “Memory Deficits” you’ve experienced in your life? List and discuss them in writing here:

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing.



Decisions & Control

I can make a decision to refrain from using but many times, I am unable to follow-through with my decision. I feel powerless over my ability to not use, even when I don't want to, especially if I have recently used. Once I am in the presence of and actually see my drug of preference, I lose control. I cannot successfully choose to not use, as if a powerful force takes over and I am at the mercy of craving my drug, using despite my resolve not to. When I am craving, I feel emotionally unstable, my mood changes quickly from happy-to-sad, angry-to-rage, without much stimulus to incite the change. It just happens, without my permission.



What are the other aspects of “Decisions & Control Deficits” you’ve experienced in your life? List and discuss them in writing here:

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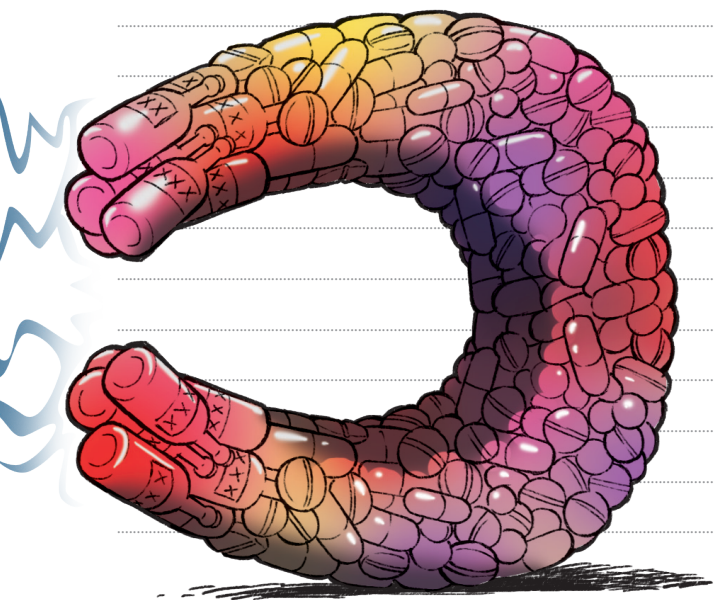
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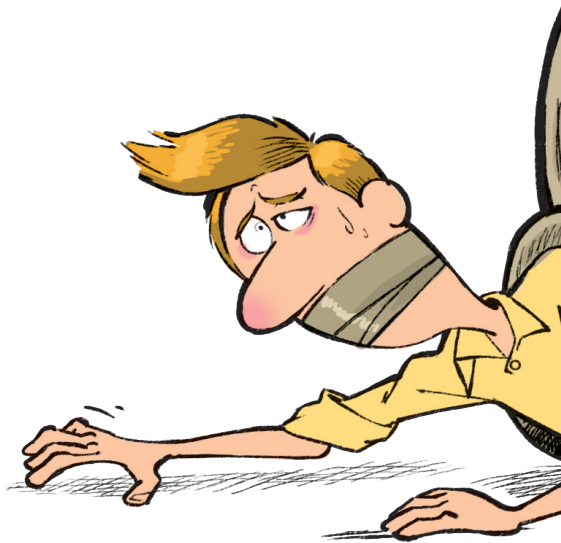
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Movement & Speech

I often find myself searching for the right words in conversations, words I used to know in the context for which I seek them. I feel very limited in my vocabulary resources; very unlike I used to feel in conversation which was confident and adept. I find myself stuttering and/or groping for words.

I also feel like my coordination and dexterity have diminished a great deal. Movements and tasks that used to come very easily for me are much more difficult and I feel sluggish. My driving skills and confidence behind the wheel have diminished and this makes me very fearful of being at high-risk to have an accident.



Brain-Body Connection

I do not feel like I am in touch with my bodily senses anymore. When I am stressed, craving, depressed or anxious I do not feel like my mind and body communicate; therefore, I am not aware what my body may need at certain times, such as when I need to hydrate, when I am hungry, or fatigued. It's like my mind and body are completely out of touch with each other. My emotions often present themselves through bodily sensations, so when I don't pay attention to my "gut level senses", the result is an inability to control these emotions.



Arousal and Sleep

I have a difficult time falling asleep and staying asleep. I wake-up startled and anxious. I can feel my heart beat too loudly, remain anxious, excitable and easily aroused. I find it very hard to become calm once I am experiencing these states. In contrast, sometimes I feel drowsy and sleepy when I believe I should be alert during work. My body, mental state, and emotional being feel heavy and I often find physical movement and motivation to move very challenging.



Feeling Bad

I often experience negative feelings like a dramatic sense of guilt, becoming stuck in the self-debasement, and a profound fear of abandonment. Experiencing these feelings around my drug use creates a great deal of anxiety, even confuses and angers me. Certain words and sounds can be distressing, causing me to feel intensified anxiety and stress. These negative feelings result in an intense DRUG CRAVING in me. Despite evidence from experience to the contrary, I can still find myself believing that using drugs is the only solution to help me relax and feel better.



What are the other aspects of “Feeling Bad Deficits” you’ve experienced in your life? List and discuss them in writing here:

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing, starting from the top of the page and ending just above the cartoon illustration.



Feeling Good

The seduction of drugs for me is highly rewarding and beckons me, loudly and frequently. The rewarding experience begins with simply thinking about my drug or obtaining it. It induces a kind of pleasure for me that even thinking about them not just seeing, causes this change. The degree of promised reward from my drug profoundly replaces other formerly pleasurable things. I seem to avoid doing things and going places that I used to enjoy. Without using drugs to change the way I feel, I do not seem to have effective skills to entertain myself or possess a basic interest in doing previously enjoyable activities alone.



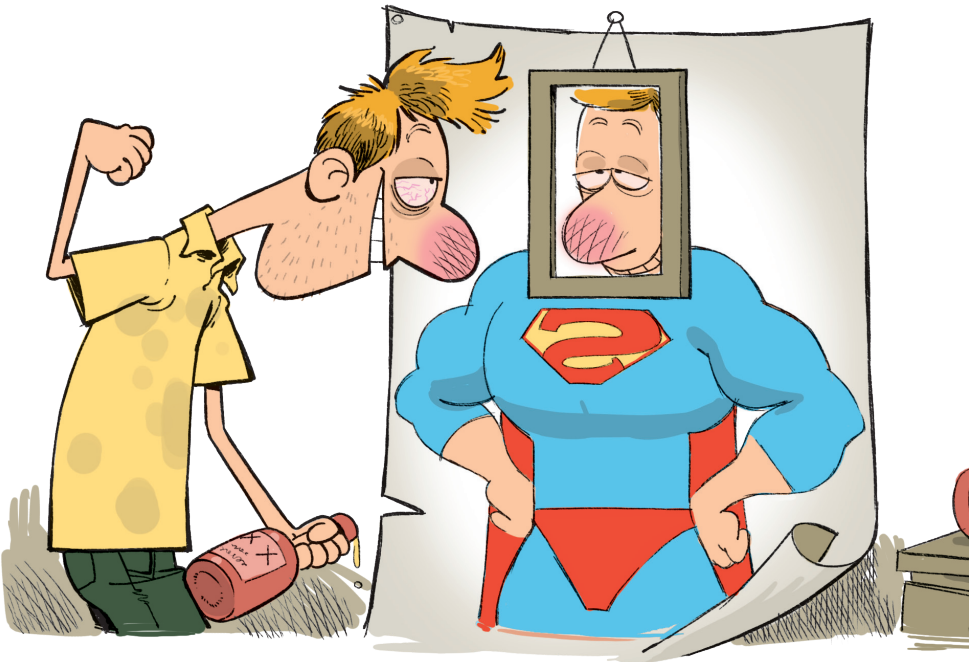
Social Cognition

I have difficulty identifying and expressing my emotions, clearly and understandably. I realize that I cannot accurately pick-up on cues coming from other people about how they see me or interpret my behavior, so I have lost my ability to empathize. Because I cannot access this type of insight, communicating with my family and others is especially difficult for me. I also seem to be unable to and uninterested in making new friends.



Awareness & Insight

Despite what some of my friends, relatives, and co-workers might say, I do not see myself as someone who has a disease, needs medical care or other treatment. I only drink and use recreationally and can stop anytime I want to. I simply don't want to. I am tempted to use because it feels good when I use. I like the effects produced by alcohol and/or other drugs, cannot see, in the using brain state, how they hurt me; therefore, I do not see the benefit of abstaining or asking for help.

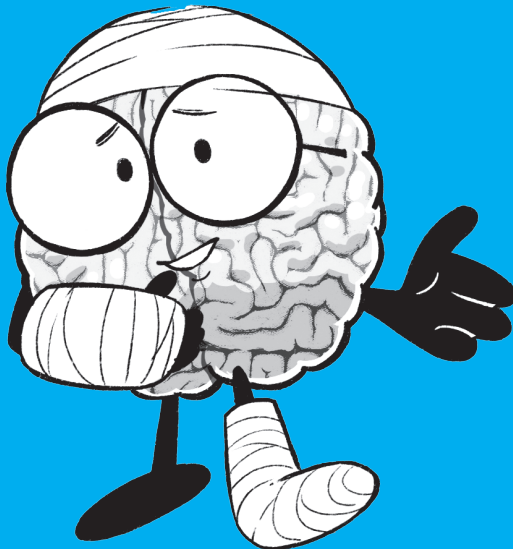


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“Do’s”

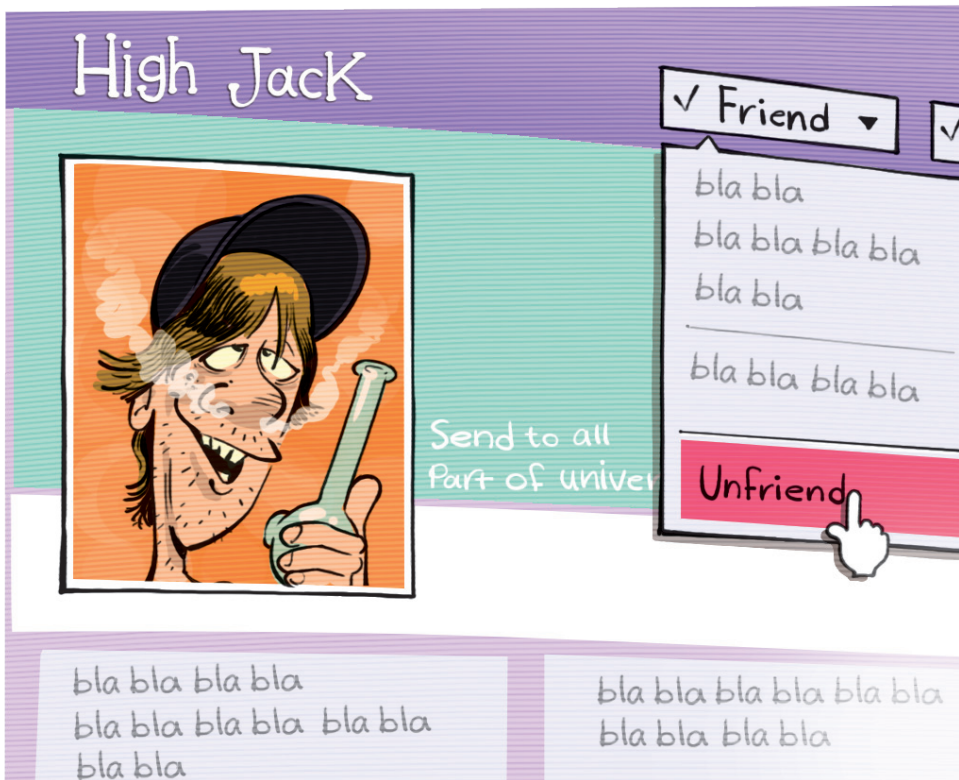
to Foster **Brain
Recovery**

Starting at **Initial
Abstinence**



Commit to abstinence from intoxicants

- 1. Avoid** places where you used/drank. Any drug-related cue can activate processes in your brain that are harmful for its health.
- 2. Break** relationships with all using partners. Your brain needs new healthy friends to be able to recover.
- 3. Affirm** commitment to “total abstinence” from any drug, including alcohol, legal or illegal. Your brain is very vulnerable to any intoxicant during recovery. Take care of it responsibly.



Identify and describe other recovery activities you may be aware of or already be using you believe are useful.

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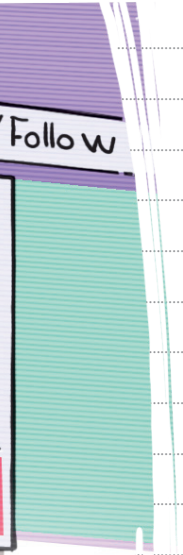
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Be patient and hopeful

- 1. Treat** your brain as you would any other injured part of your body that needs extended rest and healing for a period of time to experience recovery
- 2. Rely** upon the example of other injuries healing over time, accept that you will achieve your brain health gradually
- 3. Gather** with and call upon people in successful recovery to benefit from their experience, strength, and hope

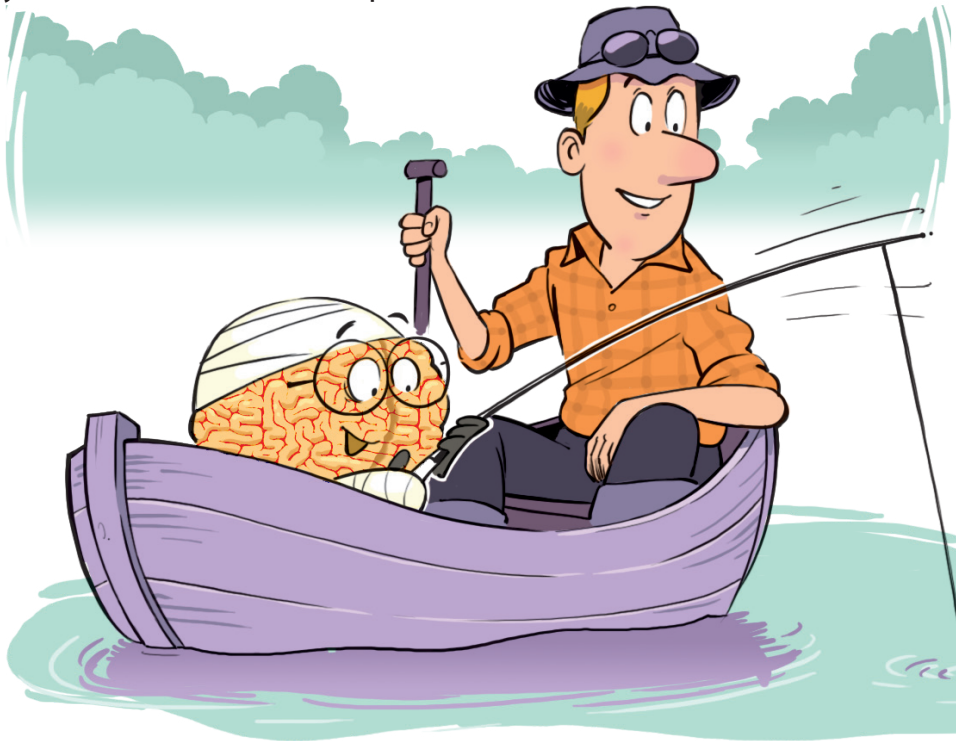


Be calm and relaxed

1. Not unlike other bodily injuries, your brain needs sufficient time to become peaceful and calm to experience healing

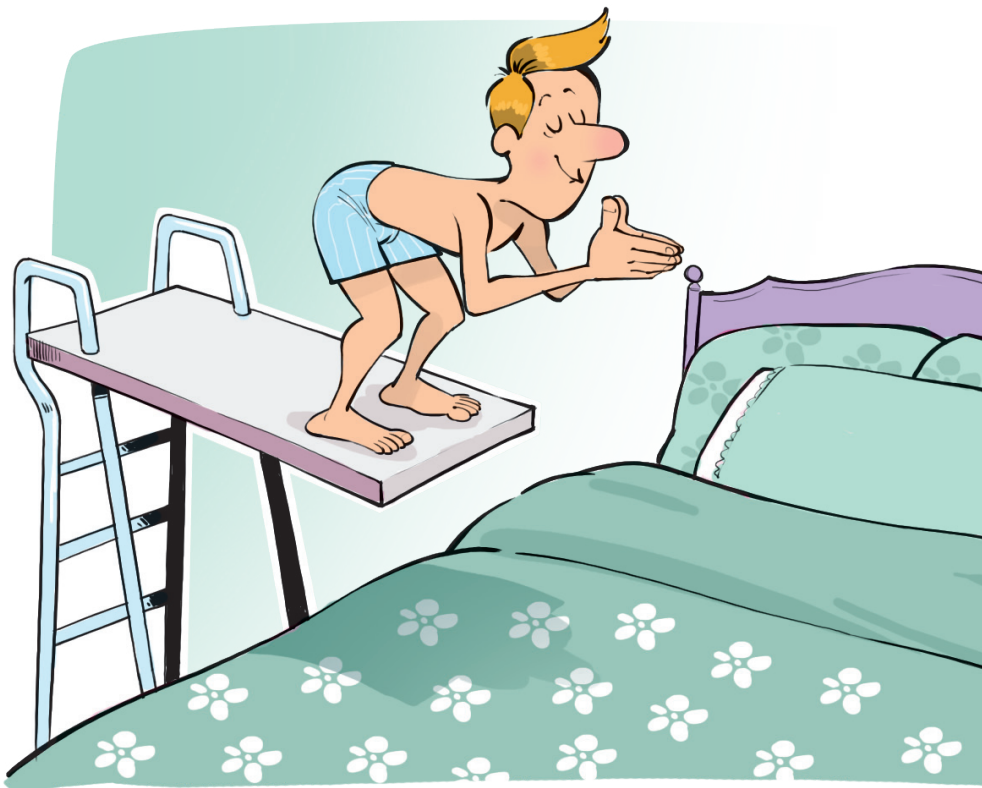
2. Stress is your brain's worst enemy and exposure to heightened stress hampers the recovery process

3. Avoid when possible, people, places, events and other things that tend to raise your stress level. You can start to gradually and slowly expose yourself to the normal life stressors after first few months of recovery under supervision of your counsellors and therapists.



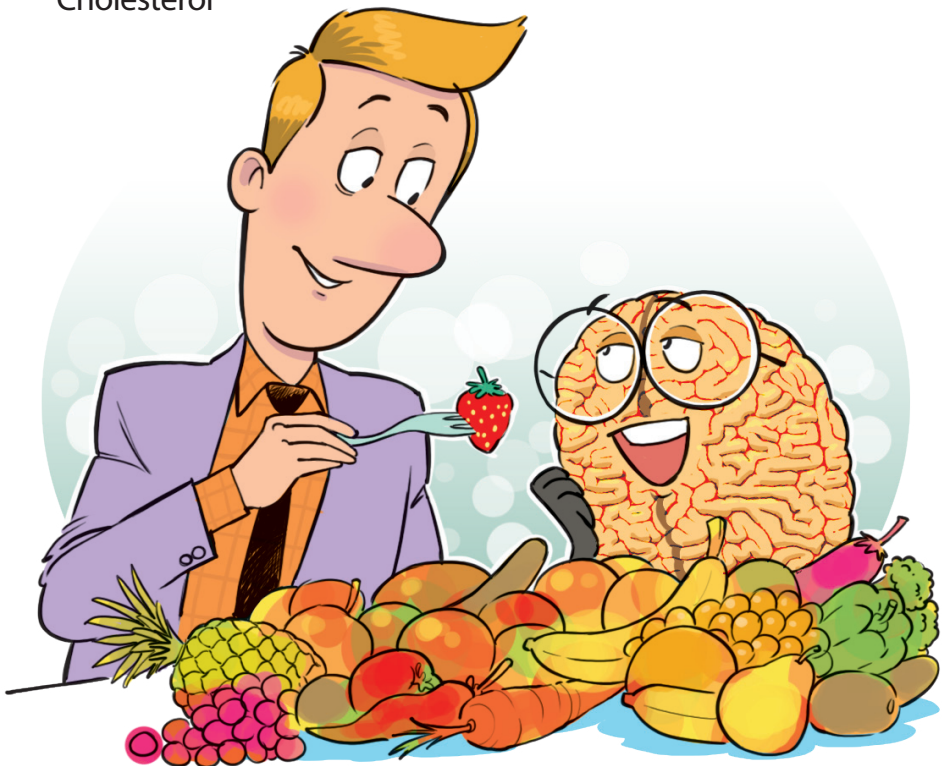
Be a healthy sleeper

- 1. Your brain** needs sufficient (but not too much) sleep at night and periods of daytime rest to recharge
- 2. Turn** your bedroom in to a sleep haven; calm and dark with proper temperature. This will help your brain to take advantage of sleep as much as possible for its recovery.
- 3. Commit** to and maintain a regular, healthy and helpful sleep schedule. Fixed daily schedule for sleep will help your brain to be rested and accessible when you need it.



Be a healthy foodie

- 1. Include** more fruit especially berries and dark green leafy vegetables in your diet. Their natural antioxidants and vitamins will help your brain to recover injured and inflamed areas.
- 2. Eats lots** of oily fish (salmon and tuna) and eggs. Their micronutrients will provide your brain with materials to restore its disturbed structures.
- 3. Reduce** salt intake and make intentional efforts to lower Cholesterol



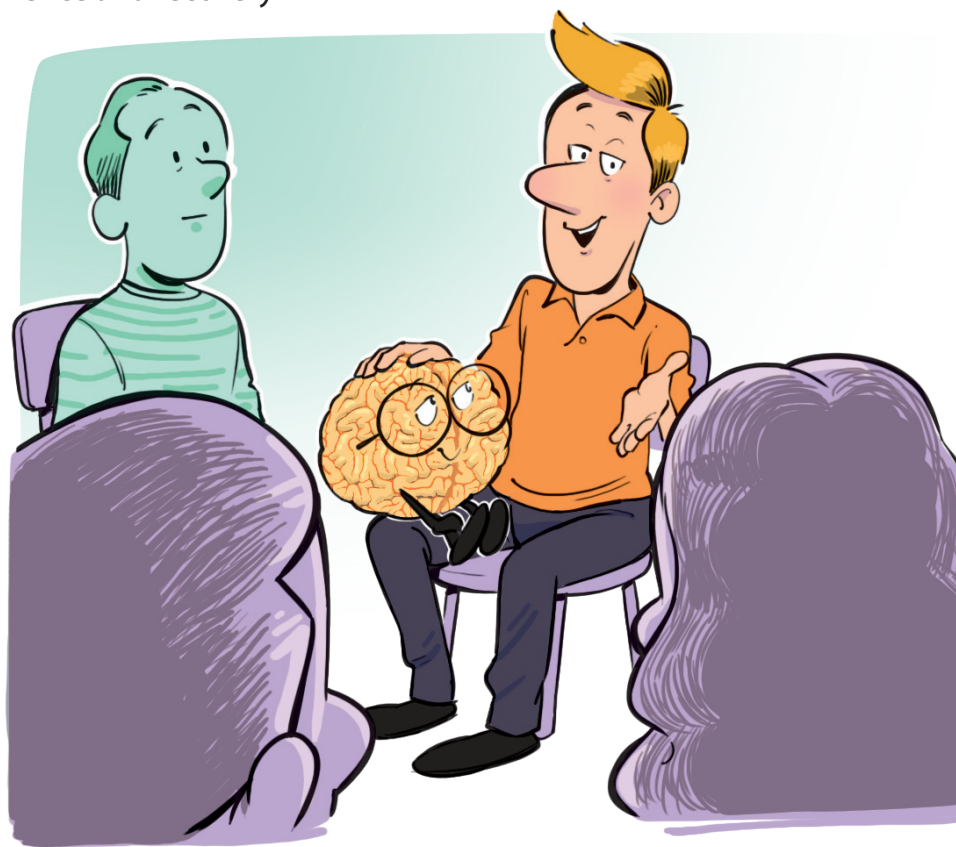
Be in tune with your emotions

1. **Learn and practice** problem-solving strategies in order to deal with daily life problems
2. **Gain** skills to practice emotional awareness in order to identify and separate various emotional states and feelings
3. **Attend** to leisure and recreation activities that can soothe and restore your brain



Be more socially active

1. **Get involved** with other people who are living in recovery successfully
2. **Be committed** to engage in 12 step or other mutual support groups regularly
3. **Be willing** to focus your relationships with people, including family members, who encourage and support your abstinence and recovery



Be more physically active

1. Try to make time for regular exercise and other physical activities. Your brain and body generate chemicals during rigorous physical activity, including workouts that promote your brain recovery

2. Engage in aerobic exercises, as recommended for someone of your age, medical condition, build, and gender to promote holistic health but, avoid too much or too intensive exercise

3. Try exercising in group-settings for support, encouragement and meet the social needs of your healing brain



Be a healthy friend to yourself

1. **Be mindful** of your emotions, thoughts and behaviors as often and intentionally as possible
2. **Be willing** to practice yoga or attend any type of meditation classes. Practice meditation exercise as part of a daily program to help your brain progress in recovery
3. **Be willing** to practice mindfulness exercises in daily tasks, such as eating, walking, and cleaning house/yard work, etc. Experiencing normal pleasures from normally pleasurable tasks is a staple of recovery



Identify and describe other recovery activities you may be aware of or already be using you believe are useful.

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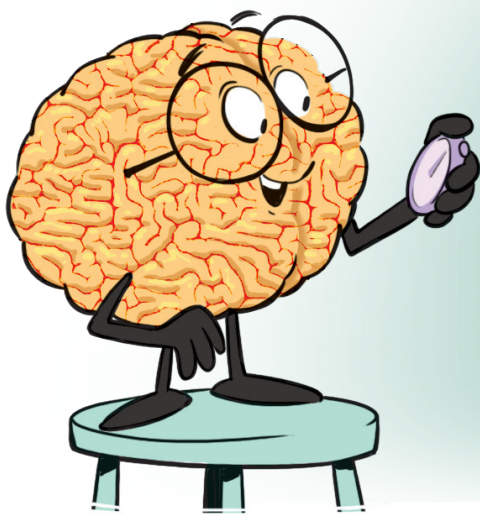


Be more mentally active

1. Honor the fact that your brain needs exercise along with your body to be able to regain its fully-integrated functions

2. Be willing to do brain exercises which are systematically designed for improvement of brain functions (see our next poster)

3. Progress gradually into difficult and challenging levels of brain exercise, much like you might increase the weights in gym exercises. Follow the recommendations of a counselor, recovery coach or other helping professional in regard to the type and level of mental exercises you practice



10 Injured Brain
Functions with Drugs &

Daily Brain
Exercises

for **Brain Recovery**
During Abstinence



Attention

1. Do Word Exercises: Practice reverse spelling during daily conversation and spell the words you hear backward in your mind. Ex: Apple could be elppa in your “Brain language”

2. Be Your “Present-Moment” Attention Coach: You can practice controlling your attention and lessen your brain’s tendency to wander during important tasks. Intentional, gentle and internal messages such as “focus on the task at hand” or “come back to the present moment” can become a habit to bring you back into focus.

3. Train Your Brain to be Flexible: Try to shift between two or more brain tasks as a daily exercise. Ex: Practice a Sudoku puzzle for 10 min and then shift to solving a crossword for 10 min and then return to the Sudoku again.



Memory

1. Journal in Your Brain Book: Document important events that influenced your day every night. You can visualize and observe the events of your day as if watching a play.

2. Play “Memory Games”: Prepare a list of information such as a grocery list or word list every day and try to memorize it throughout the day. Commit a snapshot of the list to memory for ready-access, so new words will be available when you need them.

3. Reduce “Brain Clutter”: Try to reduce the load of information taking up brain-space by economizing strands into smaller, associated “chunks”. Ex: Instead of remembering 140593251, simplify to 140-593-251. Any other innovative ways to organize and chunk information will help your memory.

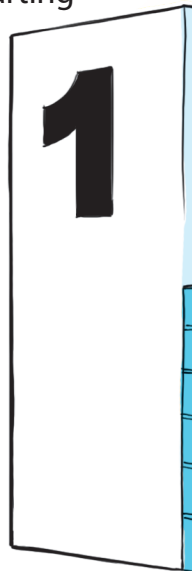


Decisions & Control

1. Set Daily Goals: Set at least one goal every day and strive to achieve it by the end of that day. Small goals such as saving \$20 while shopping or walking 1/2 a mile, to start are worthwhile. You can gradually set 7 goals for each week and achieve them.

2. Track Your Money: Try to monitor your daily money spending, even when it is very low, with writing and calculating on paper. Being a good personal money manager will help you to take over control in other aspects of your life.

3. Practice Patience: Whenever you feel overwhelmed by impulses and emotions to make a decision or take an action: stop, take a deep breath, and close your eyes. Then starting from 10, count up to 20 slowly.



Movement & Speech

1. Practice Paraphrasing: Select a paragraph from recovery literature, a magazine or a newspaper and read it mindfully. Then rewrite the paragraph in your own words, using synonyms and alternative descriptions.

2. Enjoy the “Artist in You”: Grab a coloring book and allow yourself to get colorfully creative! Try to color without going outside the confines of the patterns.

3. Improve Dexterity: Don Henley, famed drummer for the Eagles, said he first began drumming by tapping on his school books and desk. Sit and intentionally strike drum beats, varied and different paced to improve and stimulate manual dexterity. Enjoy little competitions with yourself around speed, patterns and precision.



Brain-Body Connection

1. Practice Body-Presence: Focus on your body while you are exercising, practicing yoga, sitting in meditation, etc. instead of listening to the music. Experience the communication created between your brain and body and feelings associated with it.

2. Observe Your Heart Rate: Check your pulse several times during different activities throughout the day. Tune-in to the message your pulse and heart rate will offer at various conditions. Try different ways to check your pulse. Even try to feel your heart beat without touching your external body? Can you sense it?

3. Practice Mindfulness: Observe your environment and your body with curiosity and pay attention to sounds around you as if it is your first time to experience them.

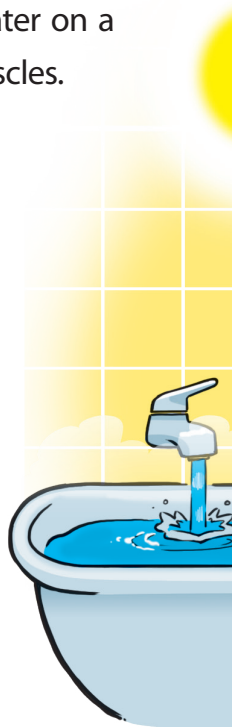


Arousal and Sleep

1. Create a Sleep Haven: Prepare your bedroom for a relaxing and soothing sleep by making it dark and quiet. Turn your electronic devices to silent and offer yourself comforting supports, such as an ideal pillow.

2. Pamper Yourself Occasionally: Utilize spa activities such as massage, sauna, hot tub, manicure, pedicure, etc. whenever possible. You can even use your home bathtub as your personal spa.

3. Enjoy the Benefits of Warmth/Heat: Take a warm shower to ease tension in your muscles. Set your home water on a therapeutic temperature to relax your joints and muscles.



Feeling Bad

1. Use Positive Language: Replace negative words with positive ones. Use positive affirmations such as: “Look how far I have come” as opposed to: “I am not progressing fast enough.”

2. Live in Gratitude: Consistently acknowledge things for which you are grateful. To your recovery friends, to your family, to yourself and to your spiritual life. Make a list of areas and things in your life for which you are grateful.

3. Volunteer for Charity Work and Express Your Spiritual Generosity: Help other people even if it seems small. Volunteering or charity work is a great opportunity to be of service to others.



Feeling Good

1. Be a Member of the Happiness Club: Try to laugh and share humor with other people. Spend your leisure time watching comedy shows with your family and offer some funny stories and tell some jokes. Turn on your sense of humor and enjoy your life.

2. Be a “Hobbyist”: Choose joyful hobbies that help you relax and feel joyful. Ex: Swimming, arts/crafts, cooking, golf or gardening could enhance your recovery and brain healing.

3. Detox Your Brain from Negative Memories by Making New Positive Ones: Try new fun experiences and form happy memories. You can visit new places or learn new exercises associated with joy and pleasure without using alcohol or any other drugs.



Social Cognition

1. Use Compassion and Understanding: In every meeting, place yourself in other people shoes, try to view the world from their perspective and consider their circumstances.

2. Allow Yourself to be Transparent: Express your thoughts, fears, and emotions to your recovery friends or family members, when safe to do so whenever you feel out-of-sorts or tense. Use a journal or a notebook to write about emotions you experienced that day.

3. Be a Voice Analyzer: Listen to your partner's expressions and tone of voice deeply during conversations and try to understand by writing about his/her emotions from voice inflections and body language.

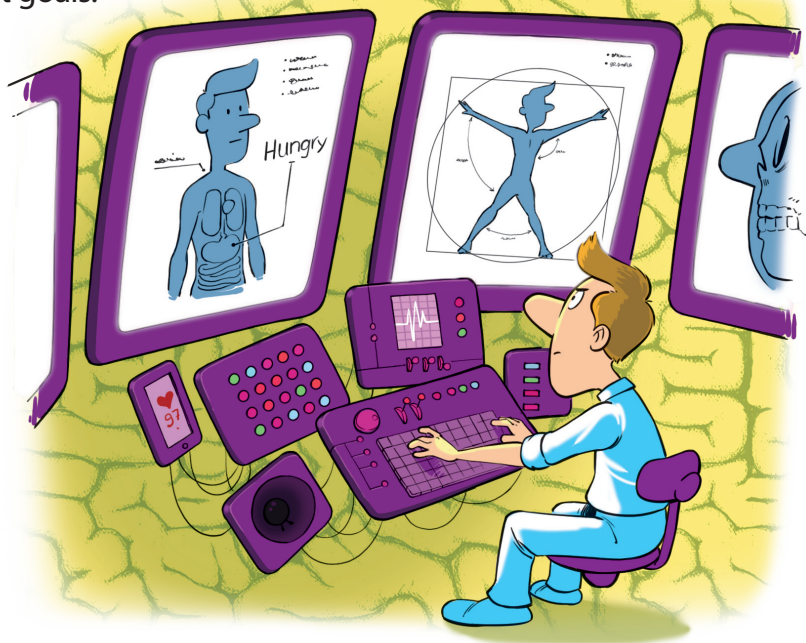


Awareness & Insight

1. Observe Your Brain Processes: You can monitor what is happening inside your brain and ask yourself such questions as “What type of process is my brain engaged in right now?” “What brain processes encourage me to feel certain emotions such as glad, sad, or mad?”

2. Attend to Your Posture: Use your brain power to monitor your posture moment by moment especially when you are in the middle of walking, typing or watching TV.

3. Live Weight-Conscious: If your body weight has been a health risk for you, find out what your ideal BMI is. Find brain processes that help you reach your food intake and body weight goals.



Concluding Remarks

Recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs is a life-long journey. The brain-healing necessary to restore damaged and regain lost brain functions is vital for sustained addiction recovery. Advances in technology and other research efforts are allowing us to learn more, all the time, about our brain and how we can potentially heal lost capabilities. Offering yourself continued education about brain health and what that means to aid in your progress in recovery will help you to be better prepared for challenges that arise on the path of recovery.

Testing your brain's resiliency with intentional daily tasks and exercises will offer you more confidence with each successful completion. Use your own creativity and challenge yourself to add different brain exercises to your life like we have encouraged you to do in the third part of the book. Be daring and imaginative. You will amaze yourself in the journey, the more exploratory you are with your brain exercises.

1

10 Brain Functions Injured by Alcohol & Other Drugs

Attention Memory

Decisions & Control Movement & Speech

Brain-Body Connection Arousal and Sleep

Feeling Bad Feeling Good

Social Cognition Awareness & Insight

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2

10 to Foster Brain Recovery starting at Initial Abstinence

Commit to abstinence from intoxicants Be patient and hopeful

Be calm and relaxed Be a healthy sleeper

Be a healthy foodie Be in tune with your emotions

Be more socially active Be more physically active

Be a healthy friend to yourself Be more mentally active

LIBR

3

10 Series of Brain Daily Exercises to Brain Recovery During Abstinence

Attention Memory

Decisions & Control Movement & Speech

Brain-Body Connection Arousal and Sleep

Feeling Bad Feeling Good

Social Cognition Awareness & Insight

LIBR

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“Brain-Healing First Aid: How to Recover my Brain’s Abilities during Addiction Treatment” and our three poster series, as our first productions in the BARI can offer identification of problem areas, new insight, helpful suggestions, and specific brain exercises for healing to help you put more “tools in your toolbox” to assist in creating a sustainable recovery plan. Not every area and/or suggestion will fit everyone. We have used numerous resources to come up with common brain function deficits experienced by a majority of people negatively affected by substance abuse and addiction.



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