

Handout for
Women Veterans Health Expo
Cheryle Sullivan, MD

How to best use this handout

This handout contains all the pertinent presentation information, but it is not a direct copy of the presentation slides. It is meant to be used as a resource after the presentation, to have the information available for a reference to help remember and use the tools and strategies discussed.

All my planned talking points are included here, but this does not contain the “off the cuff” stories I will be telling as I don't script them in advance. **I strongly suggest you listen to and watch the presentation without trying to follow along in the handout.** If you have any questions pertaining to the presentation that are not covered in the question time at the end, or need further information about something I've said, email me at cherylesullivan@yahoo.com

For ongoing information about brain injury, cognitive strategies and general health and wellness information, visit my page **TBI Journey** on Facebook. For specific references concerning brain fitness and brain training, visit my website page on Brain Fitness: http://www.braininjurysurvivalkit.com/Brain_Fitness.html

For many more Strategies and Tools to help make your life easier when dealing with the challenges after brain injury, check out these resources:

1. Brain Injury Survival Kit: 365 Tips, Tools & Tricks to Deal with Cognitive Function Loss by Cheryle Sullivan, MD

Available in paperback, large print and Kindle editions through Amazon, www.biausa.org or local bookstores. Brain Injury Survival Kit: 365 Tips, Tools & Tricks to Deal with Cognitive Function Loss aims to give brain injury survivors, their families and loved ones the strategies they need to improve brain function and quality of life. This book includes tips, techniques, and life-task shortcuts that author Cheryle Sullivan has compiled from her personal experience.

Readers will learn successful approaches to: Balancing a checkbook, Using medication alarms, Compensating for impaired memory function, Locating things that have been put away, Word finding, Concentration exercises, Communication tools and much more!

2) Brain Tips: Inspirational and Motivational Calendar by Cheryle Sullivan, MD

<http://www.lapublishing.com/tbi-cognition-memory-calendar-exercise/>

The calendar has daily inspirational quotes and brain tips covering areas of cognitive challenges including attention, attitude, behavior, brain training, checklists and routines, communication, control, energy management, learning and memory, organization and planning, self-care, time management and travel.

Words from a blog I wrote about how I see this calendar used:

I see several ways those with cognitive challenges, no matter the cause, can use this calendar. Besides providing daily inspirational messages and brain tips, the calendar can encourage daily journaling. According to Dr. James W. Pennebaker, a social psychologist at the University of Texas at Austin, "When people are given the opportunity to write about emotional upheavals, they often experienced improved health. They go to the doctor less. They have changes in immune function."

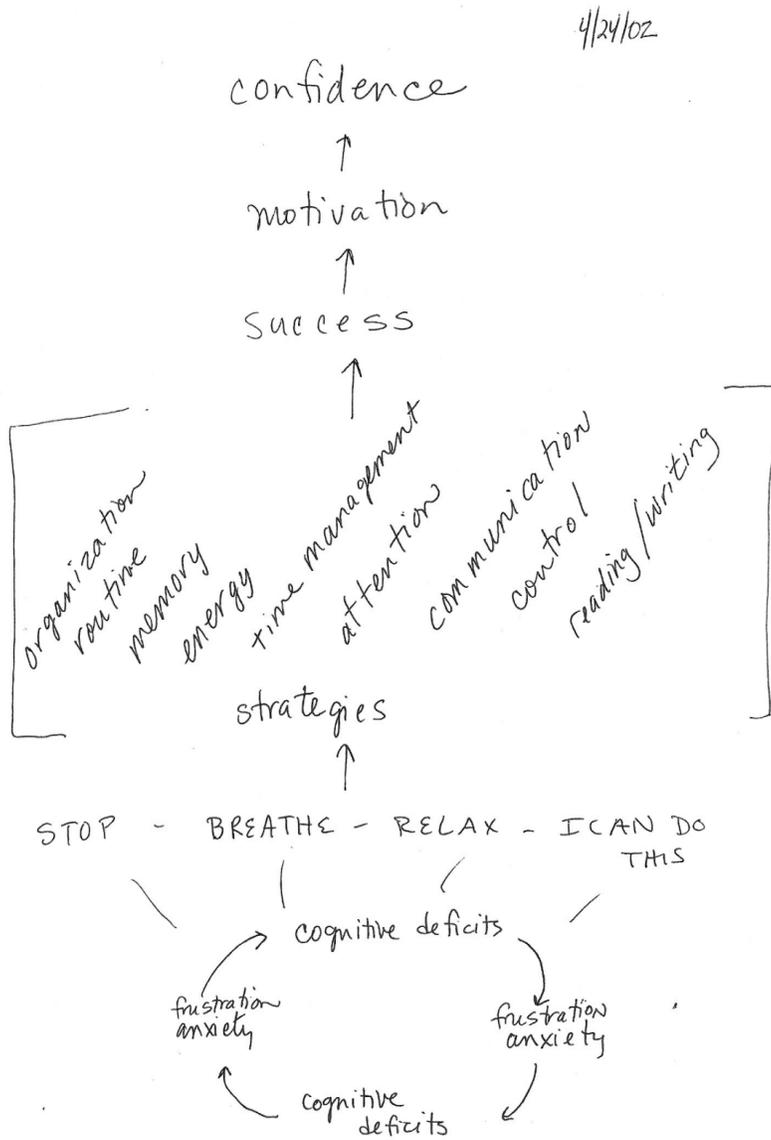
It also can be a gift to those with cognitive challenges or even their family or caregivers. Family or friends can write encouraging messages throughout the calendar. Besides the daily inspirational quotes, personalized messages can help encourage someone dealing with challenges then and in the future when they are revisited. The pages allow space to write about how a tip may be useful, to note or plan how they can be included in a typical day and can self-motivate the user.

Tools and Strategies to Deal With Cognitive Function Loss After Brain Injury

My Journey to a New Me:

"I must be willing to give up
what I am
in order to become
what I will be."
~Albert Einstein

The Game Plan



CS
Mary Deenen
MRC

*Yes, you are a different person.
Never give up!
You will learn to do things
for your brain
instead of relying on your brain
to do them for you.*

--Brain Injury Survivor's Guide- Larry & Beth Jameson

How to use new tools & strategies in your day to day life

- 1) Pick the thing in your day that bothers you the most
 - a) Mislacing things
 - b) Missing appointments
 - c) Brain Fatigue
 - d) Forgetting things
- 2) Work out a strategy, on your own or with help, to try to deal with this problem
- 3) Incorporate the strategy in your daily life, if needed with cuing, reminders from calendar/family/friends
- 4) When doing better, move on to next thing that bothers you in your life.

Self-Care: Preparing to Succeed

We're not just a "Brain Injury patient".

We need to maintain or develop good health practices to keep other health problems from increasing our load when dealing with brain injury.

All of us, with brain injuries or not, know that it's hard to concentrate & think when we're tired, hungry, upset or distracted.

Taking care of **you** helps your brain function at its best. Good sleep, nutrition, regular exercise and emotional balance are the foundations of good health as well as good brain health.

Diet- Avoid skipping meals. You can't drive a car without gas, and your brain can't function without energy from your food.

Exercise- Experience nature. Research is showing that visiting a forest has real, quantifiable health benefits, both mental and physical. Benefits include stress reduction, mood improvement, increased ability to focus, increased energy level and improved sleep.

Rest- Have a consistent sleep routine. Go to bed and get up on time so you get enough sleep and begin your day not being rushed.

Stress- Meditate. A few minutes of meditation a day can reduce stress and anxiety. Studies show daily meditation may alter the brain's neural pathways, making you more resilient to stress.

Attention

Our ability to filter out outside noise/activity may be lost so it is difficult to focus and too much happens at once so we become overwhelmed.

- 1) Arrange to meet a friend in a quiet place instead of a busy restaurant or coffee shop.
- 2) My partner says my name, touches my arm to get/keep my attention

Attitude

- 1) If you want to improve your attitude, surround yourself with people with a positive attitude and spend less time or none with people who are negative or pessimistic. The people you spend your time with should encourage and inspire you.
- 2) Push yourself just a little beyond your limits every day. If you do the same thing every day, you get in a rut. Success and accomplishment breed more.

Behavior

- 1) Establish cues, verbal or non-verbal, with a family member or friend to signal when an unwanted behavior is present. Practice ahead of time so you can recognize the cue and adjust as needed.
- 2) Think before you speak. It's easy to say something in the heat of the moment that you'll later regret. When you're emotional, upset or angry make it a habit to stop and collect your thoughts before speaking. Even better, ask for some time to think through the situation before you respond.

Brain Training

- 1) Volunteering is good for your brain. You will meet new people, learn new skills, feel better about yourself and bring more purpose to your life.
- 2) Learn to play a musical instrument. Studies have shown that learning to play an instrument improved memory, verbal fluency, information processing speed, planning ability and other cognitive functions.

Checklists and Routines

Making it Through Your Day

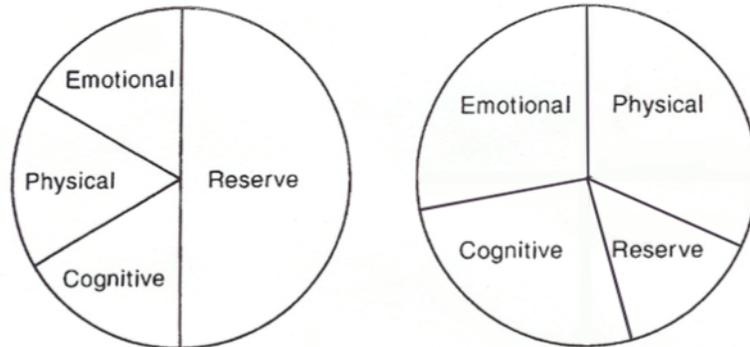
- 1) Getting Up-Consider eating the same breakfast every day, or one of a few choices, to prevent limited daily cognitive energy from being used on something low on the importance scale. Pack a lunch in advance also, to help with energy management.
- 2) Leaving Home-Have a checklist of things you need when you leave the house by the door; keys, phone, wallet, work ID, water or snacks.
- 3) Coming Home- Make sure your days contain a couple of activities that you really enjoy doing. Don't fill your day with dreaded "have-to-do things." I have a specific time for exercise fun in my weekly schedule. Other things are fit in around these activities.
- 4) End of the Day-Set out the clothes you want to wear for the day the night before to lessen the cognitive load in the morning. It's one less thing you need to use your precious brain energy for the next morning. Load your backpack or briefcase for the next day's activities.

Communication

- 1) In a conversation maintain eye contact with the person you are talking with to help you maintain your attention and to show your interest. Looking around is distracting to the person you're talking with and may make them think you are not listening or interested.
- 2) Listen to understand. Don't spend the time while someone is talking thinking about what you will say next. Don't interrupt.
- 3) Share your challenges with your family, friends, boss, co-workers to make your life easier. Keep reminding them. You look normal so they forget

Energy Management

Proactive vs Reactive



Energy Pie, Normal (left) and After Mild Brain Injury (right)

Copyright: Mary Lou Acimovic, M.A. Ibid.

1) Plan Energy Needs-Look at your week & don't just plan the number of activities for a day, but **plan based on the energy needs** of those activities.

Once your energy gets severely run down it takes many days to recover.

- 2) Pace Yourself-Pay attention to fatigue signs: Mine include: less ability to follow conversations, slower speed of thinking, trouble reading, double vision, more disorganized, losing train of thought, more errors, trouble finding words & even chills and body aches with significant fatigue. Some others report headache, blurred vision, dizziness and many more.
- 3) Prevent Overload-Be willing to bail on a "bad brain" day

Learning and Memory

- 1) Keep note pads handy-write enough so anyone reading the note would know what it means.
- 3) **Do It, Write It or Forget It.** If you can't do something at this moment, write down a reminder otherwise in a few moments you will forget about it.
- 4) Keys: they need to be kept in a consistent place, such as a peg or basket by door
- a) Set out anything you need to take along when you leave the house and put your car keys on top, that way you won't forget the items
- b) Attach your car keys to your backpack, then you don't lose your keys and don't forget your backpack

Organization and Planning

A place for everything and everything in its place. ~Benjamin Franklin~

- 1) Have an assigned place for nearly everything & make sure to invest the energy to put it there. Encourage those around you at home/work to honor the assigned locations for items that you regularly use.
- 3) "Good Place" vs "Right Place"- you often put things in a "good" place, never to find them again. Come up with a place/strategy to deal with finding "right" places for new things.

Travel

- 1) Before heading out in your car, check the tires and lights, and that you have adequate gas and oil. This simple step can help prevent you having to deal with car problems when away from home. Do you have/need water, snacks, a flashlight? In the winter months do you have warm clothes for any emergency?
- 2) Have all needed information for your planned trip. Local and regional maps, a compass and a GPS all can prevent you from getting lost in unfamiliar locations.
- 3) If traveling to urban or busy traffic areas, consider using public transportation. Airport transportation is often available that is door to door, avoiding the challenge of finding parking and the need to haul luggage long distances.
- 4) Parking: either park in consistent place or write it down or take a photo of your parking location. A friend attaches a ball or plastic flowers to her antenna to help pick her car out of similar cars in a parking lot.