

# Returning home



## IN THIS BOOKLET:

- Preparing for going home
- Useful checklists
- What to expect
- What can help
- Who to contact for further services, support or information

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## What the symbols mean:

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Key points



Where to get more help and information



Useful tips



Tools and tips to try yourself



People with brain injuries share their experiences

This booklet is part of Headway's **Brain Injury Series**. All the booklets are available online or in hard copy from [headway.ie/information](http://headway.ie/information).

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# Introduction

Going home can be a relief. It helps to be prepared and to be realistic about what to expect. Some people make a full recovery within a few weeks of getting home. For others, improvements and changes will continue for many weeks or months.

Everybody's recovery is individual to them. It may take a bit longer than you think. Try to take things one day at a time. Don't put yourself under pressure by setting yourself too many goals.

We have written this booklet to help make the transition home from hospital or rehabilitation as easy as possible for you and to help you prepare.

This booklet has:

- Practical tips based on other brain injury survivors' experiences and on research.
- Key information that people told us they wished they had known or remembered at the time.
- Suggestions of other Headway booklets to read.
- Who to contact for information, services or support.



**Put Headway's number into your phone. You can call us if you need to talk or have questions about brain injury or brain injury services. Headway t: 1800 400 478 or 01 6040 800.**



# Leaving hospital checklist

<b>Check the hospital team have:</b>	✓
Answered any <b>questions</b> you have before you go home. Note the answers.	
Given you <b>prescriptions</b> for your medications and a <b>full list</b> of all your medications.	
Given you <b>phone numbers for hospital staff</b> you can contact once you are home.	
Given you a <b>follow up appointment</b> with your consultant (usually in 6 weeks' time).	
Sent a <b>discharge letter to your GP</b> . This has a summary of your hospital treatment and any follow up services the hospital has referred you to.	
Contacted your <b>Public Health Nurse</b> if you need services from him or her.	
Referred you to any <b>HSE Services</b> you need such as Speech and Language, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Counselling or Psychology.	
Referred you to any <b>Brain injury</b> or <b>Stroke</b> organisations that offer suitable services.	
Helped you to complete any <b>Social Welfare forms</b> you need.	



It can be hard to judge now what you might need at home. So, it's a good idea to accept referrals to any services offered. Waiting times can be long. You can always turn a service down later if you find you do not need it.



## 'To Do' checklist for you

<b>Useful things to do:</b>	✓
<p>Get a copy from the hospital, or Headway, of <b>Getting what you need after a brain injury</b>. This <b>free pocket guide</b> tells you who to contact for the services and supports you may need at home, including guidance on returning to work, driving and finances. <b>Headway t:</b> 1800 400 478.</p>	
<p>Get the number of your local <b>Citizens Information Centre</b> and save it in your phone. Citizens Information gives free advice on all public services and entitlements and help with application forms. <b>Citizens Information Lo-call t:</b> 076 107 4000</p>	
<p>Make a <b>list of things you need done</b>. Then when friends or family offer to help, ask them to do something on the list.</p>	
<p>Note down <b>important phone numbers</b> to keep handy or save them in your phone.</p>	
<p>Use a folder to <b>keep all your information</b> and medical documents <b>in one place</b>.</p>	
<p><b>Get a wall calendar</b> to keep track of your appointments and upcoming events.</p>	
<p><b>Use a diary</b> to note your appointments or put reminders into your phone.</p>	
<p>If you have a lot of <b>medications</b>, ask your pharmacy to put them into <b>blister packs</b> for you. This service is often offered free of charge.</p>	

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# What to expect

Many people experience changes in the way they feel, think and act after a brain injury.

Common changes to expect at this stage include:

- Being worried about symptoms and your health.
- Having headaches, being sensitive to light, noise or changes in temperature.
- Feeling very tired and sleeping a lot.
- Forgetting things, losing things and finding it difficult to concentrate.
- Feeling overwhelmed by visitors or large groups.
- Getting frustrated, irritable or angry with yourself, things or other people.
- Experiencing mood swings.
- Finding daily tasks more difficult than they were in hospital.
- Your family being tired and stressed.
- Feeling that other people don't understand what you are going through.

Some changes may be temporary. If any of the changes are medium or long-term, there is support and professional help available. For further information and advice, speak to any professionals supporting your recovery, contact Headway or read the other booklets in this **Brain Injury Series**.



# What can help

**Symptoms** - if you are concerned about any symptoms, note them down. If they do not pass, contact your GP or the hospital team. If you have any sudden symptoms such as having difficulty speaking, a severe headache, double vision or weakness on one side, someone should phone 999 immediately.

**Medication** - it is important to take these at the time and in the way your doctor prescribed. **Alcohol** can interfere with medications and slow down your recovery. Get your GP's advice. Our **Alcohol after a brain injury** booklet has more information.

**Communicating** - if you find communicating difficult, choose somewhere quiet to talk, take your time, keep up eye contact and check the other person has understood you. Our **Communicating after a brain injury** booklet has further tips and advice.

**Feelings** - a lot of people feel low, anxious or angry after their brain injury. This can be due to a number of reasons including your reaction to change or trauma. It could also be directly due to injuring certain parts of your brain. Talk to someone you trust. If you need help now, contact your GP. Seeing a psychologist or counsellor with experience of brain injury may also be helpful. Our booklets **Anger, irritability and moods swings** and **Feeling low or anxious** have tips and advice.

**“Patience is the key.”**

**Pat, Co Cork**

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## Rest

For the first few weeks you are likely to feel very tired. This is to be expected because your brain is still recovering and you are adjusting to being home. Fatigue can be more long-term for many people.

These tips may help:

- **Listen to your body and brain.** If your brain needs a rest, it is important to take notice and not to push yourself. Have regular naps as you need them.
- **Visitors can be tiring.** Ask your family to tell people to come on short visits, just one or two at a time.
- **Have quiet time.** Switch off the radio and TV.
- **Looking fine does not mean you are fully recovered.** It is ok to say 'no' to things that are too demanding.
- Remember that **therapies** such as Physiotherapy, Speech and Language and Occupational Therapy, can make you very tired. Plan to rest afterwards.
- **Eating healthy meals** and having nutritious snacks such as fruit or nuts can help keep up your energy.
- See our **Fatigue and sleep** booklet for more advice.

**“Try to remember that even if you feel your whole world has changed, life goes on and it will get better. It takes time.”**

**Michael, Co Tipperary**



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## Routine

Having a good routine at home can help you to get back into daily life with the least amount of stress.

- Have **regular bed and meal times** if you can.
- **Plan your day**. Try to be realistic about how much you can do. Doing a little and often works better than trying to do too much at once.
- Do **important tasks** or have **visitors** when you are at your **freshest**. Take regular breaks and rests.
- See our **Planning and organising** booklet for more practical tips and information.

## Reduce stress

- **Be realistic** - don't push yourself too hard or expect too much. Gradually build up what you do each day.
- **Don't worry about things you cannot control at the moment**. Focus on what you can do. Deal with what is important and let other things go.
- Being **organised** can make life easier. Use a folder to keep all your documents together. Have one place where you keep your keys, phone, wallet or handbag.
- Try **relaxation techniques** such as breathing, mindfulness or yoga. Yoga can be adapted for changes in mobility. An internet search and local classes will give you more details on these techniques.

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## Reduce stress continued

- Try to get **exercise** regularly. Exercise can relax you and make you feel good. If your mobility has been affected, check what your GP or physiotherapist recommends.
- **Cut down, or cut out, alcohol and cigarettes.**
- **Talking** to a friend or family member can help you view problems in a different way and make them feel more manageable.
- Our booklets **Planning and organising** and **Feeling low or anxious** may be helpful.

## Memory

- A brain injury frequently causes memory problems. However, many other things can also affect your memory including fatigue, hunger, stress, mood, pain, other illnesses and medications. Eating healthily, exercising, getting enough sleep and learning to cope with stress and mood changes can all have a positive effect on your memory.

### These tips may help:

- **Use lists** – for example, shopping lists, ‘To Dos’ and lists of what you need to remember when leaving the house (phone, keys and bag, for example).
- When you meet someone new **repeating their name** as you talk to them may help you to remember it.
- **Write important things down in a note book.** Use Post-its to remind you of things you need to do.
- Our **Living with changes in your memory** booklet has lots more information and practical tips.

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## Help and information

### **Brain injury services, information and support:**

Contact **Headway** for brain injury services in Cork, Dublin, Kerry, Limerick and the South East. We also provide **support to family members**, have a national **Helpline** for all brain injury enquiries and produce these **Brain Injury Series** booklets and **The family guide to brain injury**.

**t:** Lo-call 1800 400 478 or 01 6040 800

**e:** [info@headway.ie](mailto:info@headway.ie) **w:** [www.headway.ie](http://www.headway.ie)

**Social Welfare Payments** - visit your local **Citizens Information Centre** to get assistance and forms.

You can also get information via:

**t:** Lo-call 076 107 4000 **e:** [info@ciboard.ie](mailto:info@ciboard.ie)

**w:** [www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie)

**Public Health Services:** Contact the **HSE** for the Public Health Nurse, Community Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist, Speech and Language Therapist and many other professionals who can assist you at home.

**HSE t:** 1850 24 1850 **w:** [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie).

**We have done our best to provide information that is correct and up-to-date. However Headway cannot be responsible for any errors or omissions in this booklet. You should not consider this information as a substitute for getting advice from a doctor or other professional.**

### **Booklet concept and content development:**

Brain Injury Information and Support Team, Headway Ireland.

**Lead:** Ruth Lunnon, Senior Information and Support Worker.

See [headway.ie/information](http://headway.ie/information) for further details.

# HEADWAY

Brain Injury Services & Support

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**Charity Number: CHY 7417**



**web: [headway.ie](http://headway.ie)  
email: [info@headway.ie](mailto:info@headway.ie)  
tel: 1800 400 478 or 01 6040 800**