



All about brain injury and PTSD

Life After Brain Injury – An Unexpected Hangover

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There is a certain finesse required to live a reasonably happy life after brain injury. Try to do too much, and watch out. The price I pay these days for trying to pack too much into my day can be a steep one. One day of cognitive overexertion can grind my life to halt for several days.

While it feels good to get a lot done over the course of a day, living with exacerbated brain injury symptoms for the rest of the week is not worth it. The price I pay is too high. Over the years since my injury, I better manage my internal resources, but still fall short with regularity as I try vainly to live as I did before my injury.

The opposite can be just as true. If I look back on the course of my day and feel like I have not done enough, that inner narrative can be a killer.

“You used to be able to do so much more before your injury.”

“Look at you now – just a shadow of who you used to be.”

“How pathetic. You’ve just wasted a whole day doing nothing.”

All of us live with that inner narrative, the not-so-audible voice that narrates our lives. For many of us within the brain injury community, however, that inner voice often digresses to negative self-talk.

The trick is in finding that Goldilocks spot – not doing too little, but not doing too much. Occasionally I live in that sweet space, but usually my internal pendulum swings decidedly toward doing too much. What can I say? I have been wired as a Type A person for as long as I can remember.

Living with a brain injury alone brings with it a very unique set of challenges, but like so many other people I know, I have health issues beyond just having a brain injury. Being mindful of my brain injury is only part of what I need to do every day to stay as healthy as possible.

Over the years, I have had challenges that include clinical depression, obesity and a treasure trove of things that would only be of interest to my primary care physician.

A recent health scare reminded me that brain injury is over-arching, and it can affect my health both indirectly and dangerously.

In 2018, I began taking insulin. For over a decade, I was able to manage my diabetes with diet and exercise alone. Somewhere along the way, however, I got older. Daily insulin became part of my daily two-step to remain healthy.

The routine is simple. Every afternoon, somewhere around 4:30 PM, I give myself my daily insulin shot. Though not easy at the beginning, these days, it is second nature and not a big deal. For close to a year, this daily drill went on without issue.

Until that day.

For a reason that I still cannot understand, without reason or explanation, my afternoon shot became my morning shot. I had essentially doubled my insulin dose for the next twelve hours, causing hypoglycemia (low blood sugar). Hypoglycemia can be life-threatening.

I chalk it up to my brain injury. Over the years, I have occasionally done random things that make no sense at all. When asked about some of these, I simply scratch my head and utter three sage words, "I don't know." For anyone familiar with us brain-injured folks, we occasionally do the strangest things.

The day after my double-dose was perhaps one of my toughest "brain days" in a long time. Brain fog increased fourfold. I hardly dared to speak, lest my words again betrayed me, and the utter exhaustion and achiness overwhelmed me.

Many call this a "*Hypoglycemic Hangover*." Though I've not had a drink of alcohol since 1991, it felt exactly like a nasty hangover.

There are two pieces that fit together in this puzzle. First, I took my medication twelve hours early. And second, as a brain injury survivor, health challenges unrelated to my injury are often amplified. What might have made someone non-injured feel a bit *off* for the day, literally brought me to my knees.

The all-important takeaway is this: while I need to be mindful of my brain injury limitations, I need to be equally aware that my injury can affect my health in other ways as well. I am not a brain injury that happens to be human, I am a person with several health challenges, one of which is my injury.

Living mindfully that I must take extra care in all my health affairs is something that I've learned along the way. Discomfort can be quite a motivator. Though I would love to say

that I will never make another medication mistake, I can't be certain. All I can do is to move forward and try to learn to manage my health as best I can with the limitations that come along with being a brain injury survivor.

At the end of the day, no matter what has happened, if I can honestly say that I have done the best I can, then it has been a good day - even if I am hungover!

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