

Initiation and Apathy

Sometimes lack of initiation can be very troubling to family members of the brain injured person. Even though a person may be physically able to perform a task, he/she may fail to perform it despite a lot of help or prompting.

The person may seem content just sitting and doing little to nothing during the day. This lack of initiation is usually caused by an injury to the frontal lobes of the brain. The frontal areas help a person plan, organize and begin an activity. In other words, it helps motivate the person to "get started."

Problems with initiation are not the same as "laziness."

It can be difficult to know if a person is having problems with initiation or motivation. If the person expresses a desire to quit or give up, it may be lack of motivation.

Example 1

Nick's brain injury happened 6 months ago. He is able to perform daily activities safely without assistance from others. Since he has been home, his daughter has noticed that he does not start many activities independently. When he wakes up, he will sit in front of the TV in his pajamas for a couple of hours. When his daughter asks him to shower and get dressed, he goes upstairs and takes care of himself. After his shower, he sits at the kitchen table for about 20 minutes. Nick's daughter says, "It's lunch time. Go ahead and make yourself a sandwich." Nick makes himself a sandwich, but his daughter becomes frustrated and says, "Do I have to tell you what to do all day long?" Nick has a problem with initiation.

Ways to Help

- Be supportive and encouraging.
- Set up a schedule **with** the person who has a brain injury, and encourage their participation.
- Offer two good choices when it is difficult to get the person going, such as:

"It is time for lunch now. Do you want to eat in the kitchen or in the dining room?"

"It is time for lunch now. Do you want a sandwich or soup today?"

- Offer incentives for performing activities or staying on schedule such as:

"If you make your lunch now, there will be time for you to take a nap or watch some TV."

- Be sure to make the rewards meaningful to the person, i.e., things he/she really likes to do or have.
- Provide creative rewards and be consistent in your follow through.
- If necessary, help the person get started with the activity. For example, set bread and peanut butter in front of him and hand him the spreader knife so he can begin making his own lunch.
- Maintain scheduled rest periods as suggested by the therapy team to avoid fatigue.