

POST-TRAUMATIC AMNESIA (PTA)

A BRIEF GUIDE FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

What is post-traumatic amnesia?

- PTA is a *temporary* and *expected* stage of recovery most people have after a traumatic brain injury.
- People in PTA are confused and have difficulties with their day-to-day memory.
- They may act differently. This is not their fault or choice. It is due to their injury.
- PTA can last for hours to weeks and is different for everyone.
- Generally, the longer one spends in PTA, the more severe the injury.

What does PTA look like?

People in PTA may have some or all of these symptoms due to their brain injury. Symptoms will improve after PTA, although for some people will continue.



THINKING

- Confused and disoriented
- Forgetful and repetitive
- Unaware of or minimising injury
- Unsure why they are in hospital
- Poor concentration
- Poor reasoning and decision-making



FEELINGS

- Sad or withdrawn
- Anxious or scared
- Overly happy or cheerful
- Sudden changes in mood



PHYSICAL

- Poor balance and coordination
- Physical weakness and fatigue
- Sensitivity to light and noise
- Incontinence
- Pacing, impulsive movement



BEHAVING DIFFERENTLY

- Agitated, restless or wandering
- Irritable or aggressive
- Out of character behaviours (e.g., swearing, acting sexually)
- Communication challenges (e.g., storytelling, mixing up words)



SLEEP

- Increased need for sleep and rest
- Poor or irregular sleep

At times these symptoms can cause a **risk** to the person in PTA, or others. Medication or other safety measures may be used. The team will talk to you about this if it is needed.

MONASH EPWORTH

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Recovery from PTA

- Each day, staff will ask the person questions about their memory and orientation (e.g., to time) to check if they are in PTA.
- Avoid helping the person in PTA 'pass' by writing the answers down.
- This could mean they get treatment or are discharged before they are ready
- We do not know and cannot influence the time it takes to recover from PTA.
- The team will discuss your family member or friend's progress with you.

Rehabilitation and therapy during PTA

- People in PTA will receive care and have rehabilitation/therapy.
- They may have a reduced tolerance to activity and therapy.
- Rehabilitation/therapy is different for each person in PTA.
- Sessions will often be short, with rest breaks throughout the day.
- The team will also support the person's orientation and understanding.

What can family and friends do to help?

1

ENVIRONMENT

- Reduce noise and activity to avoid overstimulation.
- Limit access to technology - speak to your team for advice.
- Napping is common. Ask the team when to wake them.
- Bring familiar items from home (e.g., photos, a blanket).
- Remind the person with PTA of the time and where they are.

2

COMMUNICATION

- Sit quietly and speak calmly.
- Speak one at a time. Allow the person time to respond.
- Repeat yourself as needed.
- Ask and explain things simply (e.g., ask yes/no questions).
- Avoid arguing. Instead, change the topic or have a break.
- Avoid testing them (e.g., asking 'what day is it?').

3

VISITORS

- Monitor how the person in PTA reacts to visits. If they are agitated, take a break.
- The team will support you in managing visitors.
- Limit visitors beyond direct family to 1-2 people at a time.
- Keep additional visits short and spaced out in the day.

4

PRACTICE SELF-CARE

- PTA is a difficult time for everyone. Ask the team what supports **you** can access.
- Take breaks from the hospital.
- Eat well and rest.
- Ask others for help (e.g., cooking, shopping, child care).
- Ask questions if unsure.

Scan this QR code for a more detailed guide on PTA

