

1. Facts & figures

- An Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) is brain damage caused by events after birth. People with ABI often experience this as a sudden change in life. Especially in terms of self-determination and psychosocial functioning. These changes can be temporary or permanent.
- It's estimated that 247,000 people in Flanders have an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI). That is an average of 30 patients per GP.
- The group of young people mainly concerns brain injuries as a result of a traffic accident, a fall, a brain tumor or an infectious disease.
- The influence of an ABI on daily life and in higher education depends on the location and the severity of the damage in the brain. As a result, the consequences of ABI can be very diverse. The consequences are situated on a motor, physical, cognitive, psychosocial and emotional level.
- **Motor & Physical consequences**
 - ABI effects the student's gross and fine motor skills such as writing, speaking or moving around. This requires more time and energy to perform an action. The following problems can occur:
 - Paralysis
 - Power loss
 - Balance problems
 - Tremor
 - Fatigue
 - Pain
 - Vision or hearing problems can occur, such as blurred vision or loss of right / left field of vision.

- Problems with the processing of sensory stimuli can occur, such as a hypersensitivity to light, sound or crowds. Or a reduced sensitivity to cold, heat or pain.
- Cognitive consequences
 - Due to a delayed information processing it takes longer to process new subject material.
 - Memory problems are common. Students need more time and repetition to take in new subject material, they lose things faster, they often forget appointments.
 - Difficulty with attention and concentration is a frequently heard complaint. Students have difficulty with:
 - Staying focused for a longer period of time
 - Dividing the attention, such as the combination of taking notes and taking the lesson.
 - ABI has an impact on executive functioning. These are higher thinking processes that are required to perform tasks purposeful and all that is required for them:
 - Organizing and planning
 - Adding structure
 - Self-monitoring: being aware of your own actions, thinking, emotions... and adjusting them if necessary
 - Mental flexibility, problem-solving ability
 - Communication problems can have a major impact on pursuing higher education.
 - Sometimes it can be difficult to understand spoken and written language. It's possible that people have difficulty interpreting language, for example, distinguishing between a joke and a seriously intended remark. Problems can also arise when someone processes information slowly and tries to make a whole sentence from a half sentence that he has received. It is very important that students dare to report if they have misunderstood something.

- In addition, it often happens that students with an ABI have problems with language production. For example, it is difficult to put structure into answers.
- Psychosocial and emotional consequences**
 - Students with ABI often behave inappropriate or limitless. This can manifest itself in various ways, such as talking continuously, reacting more impulsively without thinking about the consequences, naming thoughts more unsubtly.
 - They experience increased irritability such as being less patient or unable to tolerate much. Being aware of the increased sensitivity and taking regular breaks can already make a big difference.
 - There may be a loss of initiative, such as lack of interest or emotion. Clear instructions and expectations can be very supportive for these students.
 - Symptoms of stress, fatigue and overload can be present. These symptoms are related to the disability itself or the extra burden the disability causes. Symptoms of anxiety and gloom are also more common.

2. Focus points, tips & tricks

Attending classes

Focus points

- Taking readable, complete and well-structured notes is challenging.
- If it's a matter of motor or sensory problems, there may be difficulties with access to infrastructure, lessons and tools.
- Medical procedures are sometimes required during classes.
- Due to difficulties sustaining attention, the essence of classes is often missed, and instructions are misunderstood, not remembered or ignored.

Tips and tricks

- The use of unambiguous and clear language and a well-constructed PowerPoint, delivered before classes, enhances the process of taking structured and complete notes and makes the lesson predictable.

- ❑ Copying notes from fellow students can be an important addition to your own notes.
- ❑ Using a laptop and/or training notes can contribute to taking more structured and complete notes, which facilitates the processing of the subject material.
- ❑ Lecture recordings that are made available online after classes, offer the opportunity to review difficult passages and complete notes.
- ❑ Information and agreements about the course of lessons, codes of conduct and communication are supportive. For example, how and when questions can be asked to the lecturers.
- ❑ Scheduling a break during class can help to relax and maintain concentration.
- ❑ Choosing a location within the classroom can help make the class as comfortable as possible. For example, to avoid overstimulation.
- ❑ It is advisable to put a space or room at the disposal of the student where medical procedures can be performed and where it is possible to rest. Leaving class early should be allowed.
- ❑ During classes the follow-up of medical prescriptions should be allowed e.g. eating or drinking, taking medication, standing up,
- ❑ Support in mobility issues is sometimes needed e.g. transport to and from campus/ lecture rooms.

❑ Planning and organizing study-related activities

Focus points

- ❑ Getting a clear overview on all study activities can be difficult.
- ❑ Making and following a study plan is not obvious.
- ❑ Prioritizing and making time estimations can be difficult which leads to deadlines being missed.
- ❑ Study materials can get lost leading to an increase in time pressure.

Tips and tricks

- Providing an overview of all assignments and tasks helps to create an overview and make up an efficient study plan.
- Monitoring the level of pain, concentration and energy can ensure a more efficient study planning of the study activities (study, lessons, assignments, exams, student life).
- Study coaching can be useful to help make up a realistic plan and help determine which tasks are proprietary, how much time can be spent on specific tasks, when rest can be incorporated,
- Learning to use tools to support structuring, organizing and remembering such as an agenda, smartphone, post-its, notebooks, timers, checklists, step-by-step plans ... Immediately note important things in your agenda, collect learning materials in a fixed place.

□ Processing and rehearsing study materials

Focus points

- Difficulty with concentration, memory and fatigue often requires more time to process and study the subject matter. This can cause problems with planning.

Tips and tricks

- A structured course with a clear layout can make it easier to distinguish between key and side issues.
- During study coaching you can focus on study skills such as applying structure to learning materials (schedules, mind maps, etc.).
- Find a quiet place to study to avoid overstimulation.
- An individual trajectory with a reduced study load is sometimes appropriate.
- It may help to postpone deadlines.

□ Assignments

Focus points

- Correctly interpreting instructions of an assignment can be difficult due to an impulsive start of the assignment or large distractibility.
- Large assignments can be difficult because of a lack of overview and it is difficult to work purposefully.

Tips and tricks

- Giving clear and unambiguous instructions can play an effective supportive role in helping understand the assignment.
- Besides elaborating on the assignment in class, the instructions are also best given in writing.
- For large assignments such as a bachelor- or master theses extra intermediate and explicit feedback can be necessary. Breaking down the assignment in subcomponents with separate deadlines can also play an effective supporting role.

□ Exams

Focus points

- Understanding the questions can be more difficult.
- Readable and fast writing can be challenging.
- Giving a well-structured answer can be difficult.
- Fatigue, concentration difficulties and overstimulation can hamper the successful termination of an exam.
- During exams the follow-up of medical prescriptions is sometimes necessary e.g. eating or drinking, taking medication, standing up, ...

Tips and tricks

- Formulating clear and unambiguous questions can play an effective supportive role in helping understand the question.
- Taking exams in a separate room where medical prescription can be followed are advisable. A quieter room is also advisable in case of concentration difficulties and can avoid overstimulation.

- The use of tools or a laptop during an exam, can be supportive. For example, in case of visual impairment.
- Extra time for the preparation of an oral exam or when taking a written exam can be helpful for correctly processing information and writing problems.
- Providing the opportunity for an alternative exam form (for example, oral exam) can be supportive.
- An exam that is divided in two parts, makes it possible to rest in between.
- An optimal spread of exams within an exam period can compensate for the overload and slower processing speed.

□ Internship

Focus points

- Due to motor or sensory problems, transportation to and from the internship location can be challenging.
- During the internship medical procedures are sometimes necessary e.g. drinking or eating, taking medication, standing up or moving, ...
- Adapting to a new context can bring stress because people sometimes struggle with change and flexibility.

Tips and tricks

- Think in advance about how you want to present yourself and what information you want to share. Both about the obstacles that you experience due to your disability and the added value and talents that you can use during your internship.
- Communicate about your needs. Providing adjustments may be appropriate, for example, personalized communication tips, tools to combat fatigue or to intercept memory problems.
- An accessible internship location can remedy mobility issues and reduce exhaustion.

- Providing a quiet room at the facility where the student can retreat and perform the necessary medical procedures is advisable.
- Spreading the internship over a longer period of time may be necessary.
- It is useful to make the internship expectations concrete. It is advisable to clarify intermediate steps.
- If the student is unable to carry out a specific assignment due to the disability, it is recommended to provide an alternative assignment that allows the student to achieve the learning goals.
- Clear intermediate feedback is recommended. Learning goals are best formulated concretely and explicitly to provide optimal learning opportunities for the student.

□ Student life

Focus points

- Finding a new balance between attending classes, medical procedures, living in dorms (grocery shopping, cooking, studying, ...) and creating a new network can take time.
- These challenges can have an impact on the general well-being. Stress, anxiety and loneliness can occur.
- Maintaining social contacts can be challenging.

Tips and tricks

- Support in finding a new balance can make a big difference. A daily schedule and structure with sufficient rest and regularity prevents overload. A step-by-step plan can help for certain actions.
- Exploring activities that are in the area of interest offers additional opportunities to develop social contacts.
- A fixed contact person in the study program can help monitor the load limit and help look for solutions in case of difficulties.
- Mentoring or buddy programs (where students are assigned a mentor) can play an effective supporting role.

- Staff members of student facilities provide for coaching in case of psychosocial problems.
- Support with finding a dorm with a good location and which is sufficiently spacious for auxiliary equipment may be necessary. If necessary, support can be offered for ADL activities by offering framed housing.