

Major Trauma and Therapy Department

Post-Traumatic Amnesia: A patient guide /Information for relatives



Aim of this leaflet

This leaflet provides information on Post-Traumatic Amnesia (PTA), in order to help family, friends and carers of loved ones who are experiencing PTA.

What is Post-Traumatic Amnesia (PTA)?

When a person sustains a head injury, changes may occur in the brain such as swelling, bleeding or other damage.

If a head injury is mild, changes may be temporary and wear off over time. If the brain injury is more severe, damage to the brain can be longer-lasting.



Patient Information

PTA specifically refers to the immediate period after a brain injury, where the injured person is conscious and awake, however appears confused and memory loss may be present. There may also be a period of agitation observed, and this can be upsetting and distressing for family and friends to see.

To determine the length of PTA, the injured person may see an Occupational Therapist or Clinical Psychologist who may carry out some assessments.

Features of PTA

A person in PTA may experience the following:

- **Disorientation** – not knowing their name, the date, where they are, or what has happened to them.
- **Agitation** – the person may be verbally abusive or try to assault others (because they don't fully understand what is going on).
- **Amnesia** – the person may struggle to remember new information from hour to hour or day to day, e.g. Forgetting conversations or who has visited.

It is also important to remember:

- The person may be confused due to other reasons:
 - Sedation
 - Side effects of other medications
 - Infection

Recovery from PTA

- PTA is a temporary stage in recovery
- PTA duration varies from person to person
- The duration of PTA is an indicator as to how serious the head injury is
- The longer the period of PTA, the more severe the head injury.

What can you do to help the person with PTA?

This period of PTA can be an upsetting and distressing time. Sometimes people can feel helpless at this time; however, there are things you can do.

- **Try to stay calm** – seeing others distressed may increase distress for the injured person
- **Avoid too much stimulation** – e.g. limit people at bedside
- **Give the person time to respond to you** – they may struggle to give their attention to you or concentrate so give them plenty of time
- **Help orientate the person** – e.g. the date, where they are, etc.
- **Take time out** – it can be emotionally and physically exhausting being with a loved one in hospital. Take time to look after yourself too.
- **Try not to take things personally** – remember that the injured person may not be in control or aware of their actions.

Sources of support

The following group may be contacted for support:



the brain injury association

Headway is the UK-wide charity that works to improve life after brain injury. Through its network of more than 125 groups and branches across the UK, it provides support, services and information to brain injury survivors, their families and carers, as well as to professionals in the health and legal fields.

www.headway.org.uk

Telephone: 0808 800 2244

Patient Information

Questions

There may be many questions that people want answered regarding their loved one. Please write any questions here, and take the opportunity to ask the medical staff.

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The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 02476 96 51 06 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy

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