Post Traumatic Amnesia
Information for Family and Friends
Summary Points to Remember

- Post Traumatic Amnesia (PTA) is a period of recovery where a person may be confused and/or behave differently following a brain injury.
- In this situation we can help by providing a calm and quiet environment.
- We encourage you to read this booklet to help you understand what PTA is.

How to use this booklet

This booklet provides you with some information to help you better understand what is happening to your loved one. We have also included some tips on how you may best look after yourself.

Reading this entire booklet may at first seem difficult and you may feel overwhelmed or distressed. We recommend that you read one small section at a time and then read more as you feel you need more information.

This booklet can also be passed onto family and friends to assist them understanding what your loved one is going through.

We hope that it is helpful.
Welcome to the ward

The health care team is experienced in managing people in Post Traumatic Amnesia, this condition is commonly known as PTA. The team includes a social worker, occupational therapist, speech therapist, physiotherapist, dietician, neuropsychologist, chaplain or pastoral care worker, and of course the doctors and nurses. They are most willing to answer any questions or concerns you may have.

This booklet has been designed to answer the most common questions about PTA including:

- What is PTA?
- What are common symptoms of PTA?
- What things can you do to help someone in PTA?
- How to take care of yourself
- What happens after RMH?
What is PTA?

On waking from a coma or a loss of consciousness, people who have sustained a brain injury may experience a period called post traumatic amnesia or PTA. This is a stage of recovery when a person may be partially or fully awake, but they are confused, disorientated and unable to retain memory of day-to-day events, during this time they may also easily forget new information or instructions given to them. They may not be fully aware of where they are, or what is happening to them and may have trouble recognising the people around them.

What causes PTA?

The true cause of PTA is unknown; however it is believed to occur after a knock to the head and can result in temporary or permanent damage to the brain.

Damage to the brain may range from a mild injury, such as one caused by a blow to the head during a football tackle, which leaves the person feeling stunned; through to a more serious injury such as one caused by a car accident resulting in the person being unconscious (in a coma) in the intensive care unit for a time.

How long does PTA last?

PTA may last for a few minutes, a few days or weeks. It is difficult to predict when a person will come out of PTA. In general, the longer the period of PTA, the more difficulties the person may have in the long term.
What are the common symptoms of PTA?

You may find a person in PTA shows some or all of the following symptoms, which may vary in severity. These symptoms fall under four categories:

1. **Cognition or Thinking**
   - Confusion and disorientation: *they may not be sure where they are, who the people around them are, what the date and time is or what is happening to them*
   - Forgetfulness: *continually asking the same question or repeating behaviour and/or unable to remember new information from one minute to the next*
   - Fixated on a topic or activity: *continually playing with a dressing or bandage*
   - Planning and problem solving: *difficulty organising themselves to have a shower*
   - Lack of insight: *the person may be convinced that they have recovered and can sound convincing to those around them, but their judgment and their ability to make sensible decisions is reduced*
2. Physical

- Headaches
- Nausea and vomiting
- Dizziness
- Unsteady on their feet
- Intolerance to bright lights and loud noises

3. Emotions

- Changing emotions: *they may be drowsy or talkative, quiet, aggressive, rude or irritable*
- Depressed

4. Behaviours

- Inappropriate behaviours: *may swear or make sexually explicit gestures*
- Impulsive: *eg sleeping one minute and standing on a broken leg the next*
- Poor or irregular sleep patterns
- Restlessness or needing to wander
- Aggressiveness, agitation
- Irritable or withdrawn

The person may exhibit these behaviors even if these were not their previous behaviors and are out of character.
What things can you do to help?
Having a family member in PTA can be very distressing. It is not possible for the person in PTA to change the way they are behaving, however, these behaviours can be managed or minimised within the right environment designed especially for the person in PTA.
There are a number of useful tips you may like to bear in mind when you next visit.

Reducing Stimuli
- Loud noises should be avoided
- It is recommended that the person is cared for in a quiet and calm environment, this means no television, computers and/or mobile phone, these things can be reintroduced when the person's condition allows
- Keep lights dim and blinds closed to help create a calmer atmosphere and encourage rest
- Don’t wake the person in PTA if they are sleeping. Rest is a vital part of recovery, it doesn’t matter what time of the day or night it is
- They should only be woken for meals and important procedures
Sometimes it is not possible to provide this environment due to the person’s medical needs.

Visiting

- Ask all of your visitors to report to the nurses’ station before entering the room. It might not be a good time for the person in PTA to have visitors.
- Visitors can be very tiring for a person in PTA and can trigger unwanted behaviours so try to keep visits short, simple and only with very close family and friends.
- We recommend that only two people visit at a time and visits are limited to 20 minutes. Allow at least 30 minute rest period between visitors.
- It may help to set up a visiting roster with family and friends.
- Whilst visiting it is best to just sit quietly with the person, hold their hand and don’t wake them if sleeping. Rest is very important to their recovery.
- Remember, you might not need to do much talking when you visit. Sometimes just being present is enough.
• If two people are visiting at a time avoid having a conversation in the room, over the person or about them

**Communication**

• Keep communication simple; give the person instructions one at a time.

• Explaining things in basic terms as they are happening will help

Remember that when in PTA, people often say things that don’t make much sense. Try to reassure, rather than challenge their thinking when this happens
Reorientation

- You can help with orientation by giving gentle reminders to the person about the date, time, where they are and the reason why they are in hospital.

- The orientation board is used to assist the person with their memory; it may be helpful for you to encourage them to look at the board when they are confused.

- Personal items such as scarves, toys and ornaments that possess a special meaning are also helpful, as they are familiar to the person.

- Photos may also be reassuring during this time; these are particularly helpful in reorientating the person when he or she is confused and upset.

- We recommend that you only bring in one or two of these items.
How to take care of yourself

This may be one of the most stressful situations you have experienced. The health care team are dedicated to helping you through this traumatic event.

The following suggestions may help during this difficult time:

• Rotate family visits

• During visiting hours it is important that the person has time alone to allow him or her to rest and recover

• It is important that you spend time with your other family members and friends for support

• Write important information down in a diary or notepad

• You can use this to keep track of the questions you wish to
ask the health care team members and to describe how your loved one is progressing each day

Maximise communication by nominating one or two people to represent the person, they can communicate with the rest of your family and friends. This will ensure that everyone receives the same information regarding the person’s condition.

- Be kind to yourself
- Take time for a walk or have a meal with a friend. Also, try to leave the hospital for some recreational activities or a restful night’s sleep. It is important that you take care of yourself
- When someone offers to help, accept the offer
  *You may need to be specific about how this person can help you*
- Express your feelings
- We encourage you to talk about how you feel, whether
positive or negative, with your family members, friends and health care team.

**What happens after the Royal Melbourne Hospital?**

After coming out of PTA, a person might require some rehabilitation to assist in their mental (PTA) and/or physical (broken bones) recovery. This includes assistance with returning to work, family life, and social activities.

This will require the person to be transferred from The Royal Melbourne Hospital to a rehabilitation centre or dedicated unit.

These units specialise in caring for people in PTA or who suffered a traumatic brain injury and provide a quiet, safe and appropriate environment for recovery.

The health care team will help you access information about the available rehabilitation centres and the types of services they include.

Not everyone who has experienced PTA will require an inpatient admission to a rehabilitation unit.

Given that PTA is the result of an injury to the brain, some people will continue to experience cognitive, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties after PTA has resolved. The duration, severity and functional impact of these difficulties depend on several factors.

If a person is no longer in PTA prior to discharge, the healthcare team will assess his or her ability to safely return home and organise any services and follow up such as outpatient appointments that they might require after discharge.
**Support groups and further reading:**

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<tr>
<th><strong>Headway Victoria</strong></th>
<th><strong>ABI Services Guide 2009/10</strong></th>
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| Association for Head Injured Inc.  
2nd Floor, 212 King Street  
Melbourne, 3000  
Ph: 03 9642 2411  
Email: hwveo@vicnet.au  
www.headwayvictoria.org.au | Acquired Brain Injury  
Services Resource  
http://www.abiservices.com.au |

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<th><strong>Brain Foundation</strong></th>
<th><strong>Brain Injury Matters Inc</strong></th>
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| Ph: 9845 2950 / 1800 677 579  
www.brainfoundation.org.au | Level 4, Ross House,  
247 Flinders Lane,  
Melbourne, 3000  
Ph: 9639 7222  

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<th><strong>Support Groups</strong></th>
<th><strong>Brainlink Services Limited</strong></th>
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| Full list available on ABI services  
website including counseling,  
supports for patients and their  
carers. | The Nerve Centre,  
54 Railway Road,  
Blackburn VIC 3130  
Ph: 1800 677 579  
http://www.brainlink.org.au/ |
As a family member or friend of someone who is in PTA, there are a number of practical things that you can do to help their recovery.

**Please bring in:**

- Two or three photos that include the person in PTA with loved ones, friends and/or pets. Write the first name and relationship of people on the back of the photo. Try to avoid photos with lots of people in them.
- A small number of items from home that are familiar to the person in PTA or have particular significance (eg their doona cover, a football scarf, a favourite stuffed animal, etc).
- Any toiletries that they used regularly.
- Walking shoes, pajamas and dressing gown from home.
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Approved by head of Department of Surgery A/Professor Rodney Judson, Divisional Director of Surgery, Periop & Trauma: A/Professor Fary Khan, Director of Rehabilitation; and Director of Neurosurgical Training, Mr Bhadu Kavar

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