Making Life Easier

Since this injury limits abilities in one or both arms performing ordinary tasks (such as cooking) can be difficult. The good news is that there are many items that can make life just a little easier.

Ever thought of looking at all the gadgets available that make one handed use possible while shopping? The next time you go shopping, check out the kitchen section and look for rubber/silicone coated cutting boards, mixing bowls etc. When shopping for winter items, check out the glove mitten combos, they have been bpi community suggested.

For more great ideas and community suggested useful items download the Fall 2006 issue of Outreach magazine on the UBPN web site.

Also, the UBPN web site has a helpful link to our Amazon store with wonderful “one-handed” items.

Moving Forward

Don’t let this injury dominate your life and try not to let it slow you down.

Stay as active as you can and, if at all possible, as active as you were before the injury. If you played sports, worked out at the gym or jogged everyday – keep it up. Keeping active will help to maintain good health and strengthen the rest of your body.

At first, you may feel “off balance” or like your posture is not right, but keep at it, you will adapt to your injured arm. Work with your body and find what works for you. Some people prefer to wear braces or slings while they exercise to keep their arm in place, while others prefer to keep it free. Do what works for you, but be careful not to fall – it takes awhile to adjust and keep balanced.
Dealing with Physical Affects

Most people dealing with traumatic brachial plexus injuries (TBPI) have survived life-threatening trauma, possibly related to an auto or motorcycle accident or surgical complication. They pulled through and now they are left with a life-altering disability.

TBPI have various degrees of severity and no two injuries are exactly the same. Pain is variable for all patients as well. Pain specialists are available; however, everyone has to find their own ways of dealing with the pain.

Many find that even “non-medical” ways, such as relaxation techniques and keeping busy can help them escape the pain. Keeping warm and getting plenty of rest can also help.

Many people with TBPI deal with chronic pain on a daily basis.

Even though nerve pain can be present, so is numbness. Numbness is a big concern because “external pain” can not be felt. Be especially careful when cooking or working with hot items so that you don’t burn yourself.

Also, be careful when out in the sun – use plenty of sunscreen on your affected arm, especially if surgical scars are present as that arm may burn faster.

Emotional Well-Being

Chronic pain as well as life altering injuries can lead to depression. Your emotions will fluctuate up and down. Let family and friends help, but you must also help yourself.

The more you do for yourself, the better you will feel. Many of the tasks that you took for granted before your injury will now be a challenge. With practice you will find different ways to accomplish these tasks.

An occupational therapist can provide you with many helpful one-handed hints to doing things. Gaining independence is very empowering and will greatly improve your outlook on life.

Getting back to school or work will be another great leap towards independence. If at all possible, get back to your place of employment. Not only does this give you independence but it also helps to keep your mind active. Most states have social workers who can assist you with getting an appropriate job.

If you were once right-handed, maybe now you have to become left-handed or visa versa. Most schools allow classes to be recorded or will provide note takers until you can write faster/better.

You are not alone! Many people are dealing with brachial plexus injuries. If you have questions or would like to see how other people deal with their injuries visit the TBPI message boards on the UBPN web site.

Visit a Specialist

Getting a second opinion with a TBPI specialist is probably the most important first step. There aren’t many doctors who deal with this type of injury so that’s why it’s so important to select those that are familiar with these injuries and how to treat them.

If at all possible take a family member or close friend with you to the appointments. This is a very trying, emotional time and you’ll need another “set of ears” to catch whatever you miss.

For a list of TBPI specialists, visit the medical resources section of the UBPN web site.