



BRAIN Waves

Good Vibes for the Arkansas Brain Injury Community

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DATING AFTER A BRAIN INJURY

If you are recovering from a brain injury, the thought of dating may be overwhelming and scary. But with support and a few adjustments, dating again after a brain injury can be fun and therapeutic! Before your injury, you probably wondered, "What is good for me?" But now, you may want your mantra to be, "What is good for me AND good for my brain?"

Here are a few things to consider before you start:

Where are good places to meet people?

- Hobby groups
- Singles groups
- Church events
- One scene that is different for you now is the bar/nightclub. Drinking alcohol after a brain injury is strongly discouraged.

Probably the biggest dating venue in 2023 is online, and there are several options for meeting people on the internet. Here are some facts about online dating:

- 10-20% of adults in current relationships met online. (Pew Research, eHarmony)
- 55% of LGBTQ adults have used a dating app; 28% of straight adults. (Cloudwards.net)
- 52% say they have come across someone they think was trying to scam them. (Pew Research)
- 53% report lying on their profile. (eHarmony)



ASK the Specialist

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So, the takeaway from this data is to BE CAREFUL. The internet is a great way to meet people, but not all people are great. BE HONEST on your profile, but never share personal information such as your address or income.

Special planning may be necessary to accommodate for physical, sensory or cognitive issues on your dates. You can make a plan with your therapist or a trusted friend.

Something else hasn't changed since your injury — you are still at risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and you can still get pregnant or get someone pregnant. Hormones, medications, fatigue, physical limitations, cognitive abilities and emotional issues may affect your ability to engage in intimate activities, but keep in mind that you still need to protect yourself with birth control and/or condoms.

If you have questions or problems with sexuality or intimacy issues, please talk to your doctor, counselor or therapist for help!



Suggest a topic! Email us at

braininjury@uams.edu

SURVIVOR STORY: SYLVIA RODGERS AS TOLD TO KRISTEN ALEXANDER



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Sylvia (front, center) with her siblings, before her accident.

On September 2, 2021, Sylvia Rodgers was on her way to help her uncle to check his blood sugar. Someone in a large truck ran a red light and hit her Ford Focus, demolishing her car. She suffered a broken neck, which caused a brain aneurysm, leaving her with a brain injury.

She woke up at the scene and passed out multiple times as they were cutting her out of the car. She didn't know who she was or where she was, and she couldn't walk or move her right side.

Responders took her to the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, where she was stabilized and kept for a couple of weeks. She then spent 7 weeks at St. Vincent Rehabilitation in Conway.

At St. Vincent, she remembers going to intensive therapy sessions. Therapists used a waist trainer and then a walker to help her learn to walk and balance again. Memory loss treatment was a struggle for Sylvia. At first, she couldn't remember and repeat back items in a short list, like 'drinking cup, tote bag, penny'. It took at least 3 weeks for Sylvia to remember her name. "I had a lot of fear," she said. "The most fearful part was not knowing who I was as an individual. Who am I? Who is my family? It was a nightmare."

She can still remember what it felt like to know nothing when she woke up. She was devastated. She didn't recognize her family for a while. She would talk to them as if she knew them because they were friendly and they were there with her. Her niece and sister would come by every day because they worked at the rehab hospital.

Sylvia recalled, "I was going on the 7th week and still struggling with memory loss. The therapist told my family I might not recover much more." Her family was constantly surrounding her, reminding her of who she was, and praying for her. Her daughter would play spiritual music to help bring up memories. Finally, she remembered her sister's number one day and called her. Her sister couldn't believe it! She was starting to remember who she was before, rather than just repeating what they told her.

Sylvia started to be able to recall the lists of items the speech therapist told her, too. She started practicing writing her name, and was able to get it right. Before sending her home, they worked with her on math, to be sure she could function out in society.

A week after going home, she had to go back to the hospital to have a halo installed, because of her neck instability. A halo uses a ring that goes around the head attached to rods on the torso to keep the head stabilized. She had to wear this for 7 months, so she had to sleep sitting up for that period. She became depressed during that time, and it was so hard on her family. She could not find laughter or joy. They were ready to get their mom back.

She was angry and frustrated. She had been headed to help her uncle when she was hit, and could not understand why this would happen when she was doing something good.

Once she got the halo off, the "new Sylvia" came out. She felt brand new. She could dance with her son. It was still a difficult adjustment, because the halo had become like another limb. She couldn't get up on her own, because her body still felt the weight of the halo. It took several months to adjust back to life without the halo, and she had to do a lot of physical therapy to get her strength back, but she kept working at it. Her hard work paid off.

“The most fearful part was not knowing who I was as an individual. Who am I? Who is my family? It was a nightmare.”

A huge milestone in her recovery was cooking a big dinner for the family all by herself for this past Easter. The process was very different from before her injury, but she was so proud to complete it. Sylvia said, "I had to set a timer, I had to keep notes — something that I've never done in my life. Old Sylvia might have seen someone else keeping notes and then judged them, but new Sylvia can understand a lot about people and circumstances. I have learned not to judge and not to waste my thoughts, because I had none at one time."

For Easter dinner, she made dyed eggs, ham, boiled cabbage, sweet potatoes, and a chocolate cake. She said "But now, remind you, this is the new Sylvia. The old Sylvia could have whipped that thing real quick. It took me a couple of days. I was still weak in my arms and right side. I cut my cabbage up ahead of time and put it in a Ziploc bag. It took me a whole day to peel 6 potatoes, but I peeled them by myself, cut them up, and put them in a bag. It took me a whole day to shuck the corn, and I had to measure out all my ingredients ahead of time. Then I got up at 5 a.m. and set my timer, sat at the kitchen table and put everything together myself. Everyone was so happy, and talking about how good it was, and I've been new ever since."

Sylvia now has so much love for "new Sylvia". She has learned to embrace herself as she is, and she is open to sharing her story with others. One example of this is when she is at the grocery store. She lets people know that she had a brain injury and needs a little extra patience when trying to select items or pay the cashier.

She still has challenges with her body from her injuries, but she is able to bathe and dress herself. She used to wear slacks all the time, but now she wears pants she can get on and off easily, because the spinal cord injury has affected her bladder control. She is not fased by these changes, but instead finds ways around them. She feels deep gratitude for each thing that "new Sylvia" can do.

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Sylvia has so much love and appreciation for her family. She is grateful that her mother taught her and her sisters to love each other. When she was too weak, her sister would bathe her, tell her it's going to be okay, and take care of her. This month, her sister had surgery and needed Sylvia's help. She was so excited to get to give back to her in this way.

This spring, Sylvia joined the 12-week brain injury recovery workshop (see page 5 for info about joining the next round), and had a lot to say about how much it helped her learn about her own injuries and what her brain does. She learned how many of the changes she experienced were from the brain injury. She said, "the brain is something we take for granted."



Sylvia in July 2023

She loved learning how to meditate and be in touch with her body and the present moment. She felt encouraged by every person she met in the meetings, and made real changes in her life from the things she learned. Sylvia now

colors in a coloring book when she feels sad, which she learned from the group. She was motivated in the group to join a gym and goes often, and she now starts each day with her own meditation practice and a prayer for personal growth.

Sylvia is still working to grow into her new self. Before her injury, she loved to decorate, so this June she took on her first decorating project for a couple hosting a special dinner. She used an elaborate color scheme and amazed herself with her ability to plan and communicate with her customers. She could remember some of her old ways to keep costs low and make things easy on herself.

Sylvia used new skills, like taking notes during the planning process, to help her remember her tasks. This is called compensation, and it is a way for a person to work around their limitations.

Another compensation method she uses is to remind herself to really focus before she turns on the stove. She tells herself, "Now, get yourself together because you're about to deal with some fire." This way she stays safe and does not lose focus. She gives credit to "the Zoom", her name for the recovery workshops, for helping her learn these adjustments.

She loves being able to do these things for herself. Sylvia said, "I don't want to give up and expect someone else to help me get in my sweaters again. When i was in the halo I had to have that, and I cried a lot about it, because I thought my life was over. But it's not. It's better."

Sylvia's advice for others after brain injury:

- I would encourage a person that suffered a brain injury not to go backwards and try to bring back used to be. You have to start right here, knowing that you have been injured and something went wrong with your brain injury.
- Family can sometimes discourage you, when they remind you of all the things you used to do so well. I would encourage caregivers not to do this. I remind them that was way back then and that they can help me by encouraging me about what I can do in the future.

Apply to join our TBI Advisory Board!

Be a voice for brain injury in Arkansas. Read more and apply here:

<http://bit.ly/joinabic>



RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT

IN-PERSON SUPPORT GROUPS ARE BACK!

Please join us for FREE lunch and a great time with other brain injury survivors

- **WHO:** Any brain injury survivors and your guests. It can be family or friends!
- **WHAT:** Free lunch, conversation, and making friends
- **WHERE:** Baptist Health Rehabilitation Center, 9601 Baptist Health Drive in Little Rock. We meet in the Inservice education room. Take the elevator to the basement and follow the long, winding hallway past the rehabilitation room until you hear a gathering on the right!
- **WHEN:** The 2nd Wednesday of every month from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Mark your calendar with the upcoming dates so you don't forget: September 13, October 11, November 8.
- **WHY:** Community support is proven to help your recovery and we are stronger together (plus, the brownies are SO GOOD!). We can't wait to see you!
- **HOW:** Got questions? Need help getting there? The Brain Injury Program will do our best to help! Email us at braininjury@uams.edu or call (501) 526-7656.

See page 6 for information about an in-person caregiver group!

FREE TBI RECOVERY WORKSHOP

Are you ready to take the next step in your brain injury recovery? Or maybe you feel stalled out or stuck? Work with a neuropsychologist and other content experts in our free 12-week brain injury recovery workshop! This class will help you get to know the "new you" and teach you how to live well with a brain injury. Here are some of the topics addressed:



- Improved Thinking Skills (Cognitive Rehabilitation)
- Adjustment to Injury
- Community Support
- Pain Management
- Mental Health, including PTSD
- Healthy Relationships
- Diet and Exercise
- Physical Therapy
- Yoga and Meditation!

The group will meet in Little Rock for a few hours each week for 12 weeks, starting in September. There will be future virtual options, so please let us know if you are interested, even if you cannot come in person. To sign up, scan the QR code above with your phone, or use this link: <https://wkf.ms/458KQOs>.

Once you sign up, we will reach out with more information.

A SUPPORT GROUP FOR EVERYONE!

Support groups are a positive place to meet people who understand your struggles, whether you are a survivor or a caregiver. They can also be a good place to learn new skills for living with your (or your loved one's) injury. We have both online and in-person options:

Online Groups

For Adults with Brain Injury: Every Tuesday at 1 p.m.
For Caregivers: 1st Monday of every month at 2:30 p.m.

To Join (Same link works for both):
Download Ring Central Meeting to your computer or smartphone, click Join Meeting and type the meeting ID: 894 179 693

Type this link into your browser:
<https://v.ringcentral.com/join?jid=894179693>

-OR-

No internet? No problem: Call +1 (650) 242-4929, type the above meeting ID, then press #.

For more information, contact NeCol Whitehead at nwhitehead@arsources.org or call/text 479-802-3903.

For Teens (ages 14-18) with Any Disability
Meets the 2nd & 4th Thursday of the month from 4:30-5:30 p.m.

To sign up, contact Kasi Miller at kmiller@arsources.org or 479-802-3907 (calls or texts welcome).



In-Person Groups

For Adults with Brain Injury:

2nd Wednesdays of every month from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Baptist Health Rehabilitation Institute Inservice Education Rm, Little Rock
Free lunch for attendees!

For Caregivers*:

3rd Wednesday of every month from 6-7 p.m.
Maumelle Center on the Lake, 2 Jackie Johnson Cove, Maumelle
RSVP to Arkansasbia@gmail.com

*Facilitated by Brain Injury Alliance of Arkansas, 501-747-9596



HOW MUCH DID YOU EARN AT YOUR FIRST JOB? SOCIAL SECURITY CAN TELL YOU

By Tonya Cater, Social Security Public Affairs Specialist

Ever wonder how much you earned the year you worked your first job? Or any other year you worked? You can find out by reviewing your Social Security earnings record.

Your earnings record shows your income for each year worked and your progress toward your future Social Security benefits. We keep track of your earnings so we can pay you the benefits you've earned over your lifetime. That's why it's important for you to review your Social Security earnings record.



While it's your employer's responsibility to provide accurate earnings information to us, you should still review your earnings history and inform us of any errors or omissions. This is so you get credit for the contributions you've made through payroll taxes. You're the only person who can look at your lifetime earnings record and verify that it's complete and correct. If an employer didn't properly report even just one year of your earnings to us, your future benefit payments could be less than they should be. Over the course of a lifetime, that could cost you tens of thousands of dollars in retirement or other benefits to which you are entitled. It's important to identify and report errors as soon as possible. As time passes, you may no longer have easy access to past tax documents. Also, some employers may no longer exist or be able to provide past payroll information.

The easiest way to verify your earnings record is to visit www.ssa.gov/myaccount and create or sign in to your personal my Social Security account. You should review each year of listed earnings carefully and confirm them using your own records, such as W-2s and tax returns. Keep in mind that earnings from this year and last year may not be listed yet.

You can find out how to correct your Social Security earnings record by reading our publication How to Correct Your Social Security Earnings Record at www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10081.pdf.

Let your friends and family know they can access important information like this any time at www.ssa.gov and do much of their business with us online.



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Little Rock, AR

The IDHI Brain Injury Program offers a disability resource website to connect those with trauma-related disabilities to helpful resources and organizations in the community.

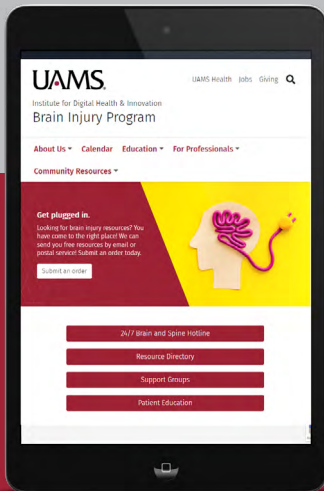
To access the disability resources website, go to:

<https://idhi.uams.edu/brain-injury-program/>

We also offer a 24-hour nurse call center for people with a brain or spinal cord injury, their caregivers, or medical providers. Call anytime with questions about your health, symptoms, or medical care.

To access the call center, call:

1-855-767-6983



For more information about the disability resource website or the nurse call center, call (501) 526-7656 or email braininjury@uams.edu

The nurse call center is a partnership of the UAMS Institute for Digital Health & Innovation and the UAMS Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, and is funded by the Brain Injury Program.

