



How to bring structure to your day – managing transitions

brainstrust information sheet

Know Hows are published by *brainstrust* to help people living with a brain tumour to understand current topics. They are produced with input from relevant scientific and clinical experts and are written in a way that should help you to understand often complicated topics.

If you have an idea for a Know How, then please let us know.

If you have any queries, don't forget you can talk to one of our support specialists on **01983 292 405**, or email **hello@brainstrust.org.uk**.

What do we mean by transitions?

There are small, almost unremarkable moments that bring structure to our day, unremarkable because these are new habits that we will have developed without giving them the thought they deserve. These moments are about the magic of the ordinary and they carry more weight than we realise. So we transition from waking to being present for our day. And at some point we put our day to bed – that lovely moment when the day's activities end and the evening begins.

Why are transitions important?

As humans we are very good at adapting to what is happening around us – adapting is what we do all the time. But it's doing the adapting that takes its toll. A brain tumour diagnosis may have brought on big changes in your day to day life, whether you are a patient or a caregiver. Changes to working patterns or having to stop working, having to manage fatigue, as well as managing hospital appointments, treatment and scans.

Why do we need them?

Well, physical presence doesn't always equate to mental presence. You can be sitting at your desk and reflecting on the fact that your last appointment with the consultant didn't go very well or sitting at the kitchen table thinking more about your next scan than the people who are eating with you. That's why we need transitions from personal to work mode or other modes – they are essential. But you have to make intentional effort at the moment because we don't have the natural change of context clues that have become so part of our lives – such as the commute to work, saying good morning to your colleagues, and turning the key in the lock as you come home from work.

How can you make intentional effort?

Did any of you see the Tom Hanks film – It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighbourhood? Children knew that when Mr Rogers was singing, when he changed his sweater and his shoes, that it was the start of their time together. Just like Mr Rogers you will have things that you do in the same way each morning. It's important to

do these things the same way each day as this primes our brains for our day ahead.

Here are some strategies

Planning your day is a way of creating intentional effort. Knowing that everything has a place in your day – whether it is work or personal – helps you to NOT feel like you have to work during personal time and vice versa. Whether you plan the day ahead the night before or in the morning is your call. Think about the mental and physical spaces you need/want to be in during the day and think about how you are going to transition between these. Planning your day and pacing yourself is particularly important when living with brain tumour related fatigue too. You can read more about this [here](#).

Prioritise communication. If you are working you might want/need to respond to personal stuff during the day – and also do some work comms after hours. Try to prioritise your communication to your context – set boundaries for others and yourself. For example, don't go on social media and don't online shop during work hours. If you don't you'll find it is even more pleasurable because you won't have that negative chatter in your head telling you it's work time and you should be spending your time doing other things. This keeps you invested in the right places, so that you can be mentally present in both your personal and professional life.

Putting your day to bed. Start this routine half an hour before you want to transition into your evening. So checking critical emails have had a response, checking your task list so you know what the next day will bring, and if there is anything that you may need to revisit that evening, but set a boundary for it.

Give yourself 10 minutes before your evening starts and reflect on what you have achieved today, no matter how small. Be kind to yourself and champion yourself. Who else needs to be championed? Let them know they did a good job.

What loose ends are there? When might you deal with them? Who can help you? Just acknowledge they are there – they'll get done. Put them to bed.

What might stop you having a good evening and then sleeping well? Are there any positive actions you can take to deal with this? If not – accept them and let them go. You can't do anything about them. Go and be present for your evening.

Yes – all of this takes intentional effort but you are probably doing some of this implicitly anyway. Is there anything you need to do to tidy up the transition points in your day? These moments bring so much value to our well-being and productivity – they really are the magic of the ordinary.

Ask yourself

- What are the transition points in my day?
- What are the habits that I have in the morning when I get up? And transitioning to my evening?
- What are the boundaries I need to set myself? And others?
- How can I tidy the transition points in my day?
- What do I commit to changing?

Contact

Talk to *brainstrust*. We can help. You can call, write, type, text. Email for help and support: hello@brainstrust.org.uk. Telephone: **01983 292 405**.

Other helpful links

brainstrust.org.uk/brain-tumour-support

brainstrust.org.uk/knowhows

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