

## Embracing Grace: A Journey of Healing from Traumatic Brain Injury

Spring 2025 Brainwaves Audio Newsletter Transcript

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ANNOUNCER: 00:00

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FEMALE: 00:28

Traumatic Brain Injury System. Raising awareness, inspiring hope. by Samantha Whitney, researcher assistant in the Center for Traumatic Brain Injury Research. Traumatic brain injury survivor Stacia Bissell discusses her personal journey to help others overcome loss, build community, and embrace their new normal. Stacia Bissell doesn't fully remember the bicycle accident that led to her injury. One minute, she was enjoying a ride through the hills near her home. The next, she was in the hospital with a fractured arm, cuts, bruises, and a traumatic brain injury. Doctors said I sustained a moderate injury, but it certainly didn't feel that way. I was an active, high-energy individual, a wife, mother, teacher, and school administrator. And suddenly, I couldn't even recall what someone had just told me, Stacia says. I was scared, frustrated, and angry, and wondered, what do I do now? Finding grace and understanding. Like many TBI survivors, Stacia struggled to overcome a range of physical, cognitive, and emotional challenges. She experienced chronic pain, fatigue, speech and memory issues, and tremendous self-doubt. Despite the well-meaning intentions of family and friends, she received a good deal of unhelpful advice, such as being told, Just get up off the couch, get moving, and do more. Stacia questioned if people understood the complexity of TBI or believed the reality of the difficulties she faced. Over time, Stacia discovered strength in the people who stayed by her side. She explains that while my circle decreased, it increased in value. This, she notes, empowered her to establish a healthier, more supportive environment for healing and personal growth. She also allowed herself time to mourn the enormous sense of loss that comes with TBI. And she says, I learned to accept help with grace and give grace to others who have been impacted by my injury. Yet to move forward, Stacia first needed to accept her injury, and she adds, reestablish myself. Resilience is key. Stacia admits it's been a long journey since her 2011 injury, during which her passion for learning and education helped sustain her. Today, she is a strong advocate and spokesperson for the TBI community. She has established support groups and serves as a mentor and coach for others living with TBI, helping them rebuild their lives too. Despite her progress, Stacia, like so many others, still deals with the long-term effects of her injury. She returned to teaching for a short time,

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but even with workplace accommodations, found it overwhelming. The experience led her to promote the importance of kindness, respect, and understanding for people with TBI. By sharing her story, Stacia is inspiring others to embrace their own journey, build community, and find hope in the wake of a life-changing injury.

MALE 1: 03:54

Extending grace and gratitude. Through her storytelling, Stacia Bissell shares important insights and strategies on living well with TBI. She favors the practice of grace, being kind to yourself and others in order to allow for healing and growth. Here are ways to put grace into practice. Accept your injury. Resist the temptation to mask or minimize challenges. Surround yourself with a supportive community. Ask for help when needed. Accept help when it's offered. Say yes to new experiences. Embrace confidence, resilience, and gratitude. Understand that healing is a process. And remember, says Stacia, there is no expiration date on recovery.

FEMALE 3: 04:43

Get moving to better health and healing, by Kayla Coutts, Doctor of physical therapy, is a board-certified clinical specialist in neurologic physical therapy and clinical specialist on the brain injury unit at Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation, a select medical hospital. Exercise is important in recovering physical health, cognitive strength, and emotional well-being following traumatic brain injury. Start by choosing an activity you enjoy. For most people who have sustained a traumatic brain injury, exercise supports overall health and recovery. It is shown to improve cognition and promote neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to rewire itself following injury. Exercise can also address balance, gait, and muscle weakness and minimize other complications, including fall risk. Furthermore, exercise can help improve sleep, reduce stress, and boost one's mood. It may also help control weight, blood pressure, diabetes, and other comorbid conditions. First things first. Before beginning any exercise regimen, it's important to check with your doctor. While certain types of physical activity may help the healing process, others may be detrimental. Your doctor or a licensed physical therapist can guide you and monitor your progress. Exercise options. There are two general types of exercise, aerobic and strength-based. Ideally, your routine should include both, if medically appropriate. Also known as cardio, aerobic activities, walking, cycling, dancing, and swimming. Elevate your heart and breathing rates and increase endurance. Strength-based exercise, lifting weights, using

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resistance bands, or doing squats, push-ups, and other bodyweight moves builds muscle. Now, the hard part. It's easy to talk about exercise, but far more difficult to get started. Here are four helpful tips. Choose an activity you enjoy, so it will become a healthy habit. Start with light activities and increase to moderate, more vigorous levels when ready. Exercise with a family member or friend. or join an in -person or online class. Set realistic goals and track your progress toward better health. How do you measure activity levels? Monitoring how you feel during physical activity helps maintain a safe, healthy workout. The rate of perceived exertion scale is a standard tool that looks at breathing, heart rate, muscle fatigue, and sweating. Individuals with TBI are generally advised to begin with light activities, increase to moderate levels for 20 to 60 minutes, three to five times per week, and then consider a more vigorous regimen. Your physician or physical therapist can guide you.

FEMALE 4: 07:13

Planning for the Future by Weisayef Pshirat, an intern at Kessler Foundation. The Planned Lifetime Assistance Network of New Jersey, Plan NJ, provides guidance, resources, and support to individuals with traumatic brain injury and their families. Life after traumatic brain injury presents significant challenges, and navigating short - and long -term needs can be overwhelming. Plan NJ, a non -profit agency based in Somerville, New Jersey, assists families throughout New Jersey with a range of essential services, including care coordination, guardianship, social security benefits, trusts, and other financial and legal matters. How the program works. Plan NJ partners with individuals with TBI and their families to develop a personalized plan that covers needs, preferences, and future directives. This comprehensive plan is updated regularly to address any changing circumstances. For example, through its trust administration offices, Plan NJ can serve as a trustee to effectively manage special needs trusts, which can help pay for necessities and enhance a person's quality of life while preserving benefits eligibility. Getting started. For more information, visit [www .plannj.org](http://www.plannj.org) or call 908 -575 -8300 to schedule a consultation.



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ANNOUNCER: 08:33

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