

FATIGUE AFTER ABI

Practical Strategies



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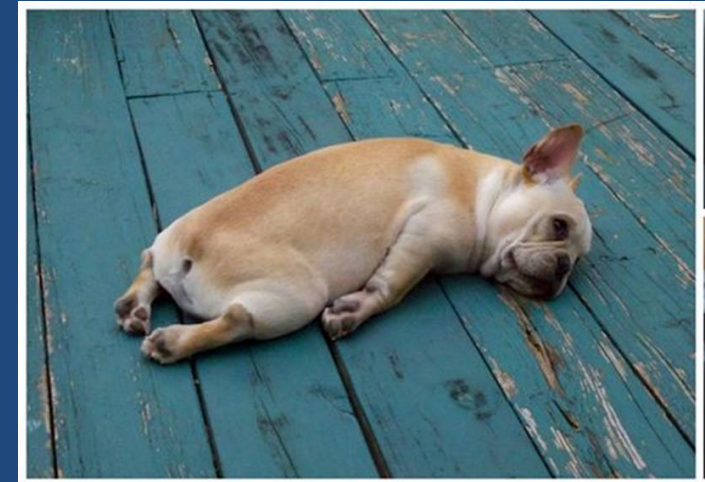
WHO EXPERIENCES FATIGUE?



- Very common after ABI
 - Traumatic, Tumours, Blood Clots, Strokes, Seizures, Toxic Exposures, Infections, Metabolic Disorders, Anoxia
 - Effects are cognitive, physical, emotional, behavioural, sensory

WHAT IS FATIGUE?

- Fatigue following an ABI is different than 'typical' fatigue that others might experience
 - 'Typical' Fatigue: Follows strenuous activity and sleep deprivation. Remedied by a good night's sleep.
 - Fatigue following ABI: Appears more suddenly, increased intensity, longer in duration (i.e. takes longer to recover from), and can have a bigger impact on functioning.
- Different types of fatigue:
 - Physical
 - Cognitive
 - Emotional



PHYSICAL FATIGUE



- Physical fatigue can come from muscle weakness or lack of stamina and endurance.
- This type of fatigue typically gets worse as the day goes on, and is generally better after a good night's sleep.

Physical fatigue signs may include:

- Becoming short of breath
- Having slower movement or speech
- Having less energy to do things
- A person's whole body may feel tired
- More difficulties with your balance and coordination
- Reduced strength

COGNITIVE FATIGUE



- Cognitive fatigue can come from the extra effort it takes to think after your brain is injured.
- Working harder to think and stay focused can use up more energy.

Cognitive fatigue signs may include:

- Thoughts and responses may be sluggish
- Finding it more difficult to concentrate
- Being more disorganized
- Finding it more difficult to understand thing (examples: what people are saying, learn a new skill);
- Finding it more difficult to remember things

EMOTIONAL FATIGUE



- Emotional fatigue is associated with depression and anxiety.
- This type of fatigue gets worse with stress.

Emotional fatigue signs may include:

- Feeling more overwhelmed
- Feeling more irritable or angry
- Having more mood swings
- Withdrawing socially
- Feeling 'short' with others

FATIGUE WARNING SIGNS



A fatigue warning sign is a signal that tells someone they are starting to, or have become fatigued

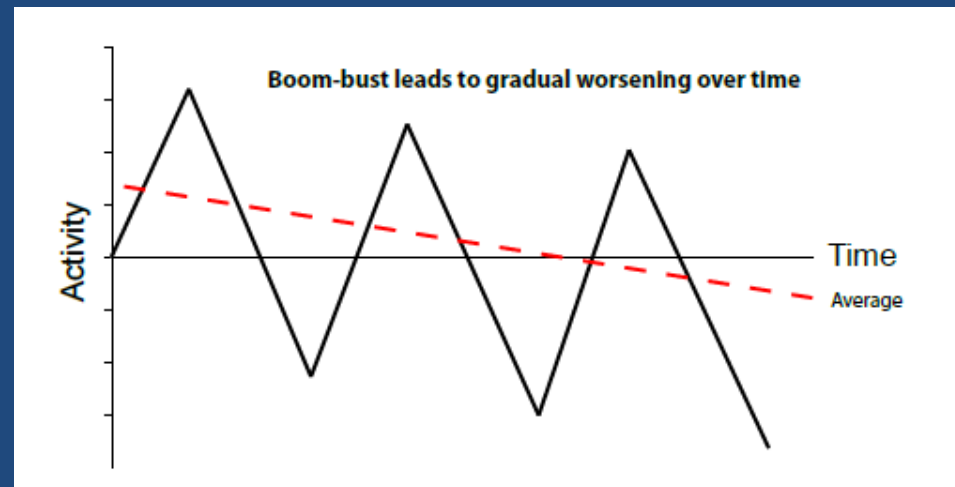
- One of the first steps in managing fatigue is recognizing these signs when they occur so that people can stop and take a break
- It can often be helpful for individuals living with ABI to ask family and friends for any fatigue warning signs they might be noticing

FATIGUE WARNING SIGNS EXAMPLES

- Yawning
- Eyes feeling heavy or blurry vision
- Unable to “think straight”
- Headache
- Irritable / mood swings
- Clumsiness
- Difficulties with word finding or clear speech
- Limbs feeling heavy
- Difficulties with balance
- Stomach feeling sick
- Losing concentration / attention
- Slow processing

WHEN DOES FATIGUE OCCUR?

- Follows demanding tasks
- Often worse later in the day or week
- Boom or bust pattern



FATIGUE TRIGGERS



A fatigue trigger is something that causes or significantly increases fatigue

- With fatigue management, **triggers** are things you want to avoid, limit, and/or compensate for when possible.
- Triggers can be broken down into **internal & external** triggers.

FATIGUE TRIGGERS EXAMPLES

- **Internal Triggers:** things that are occurring within your body
- **Examples:**
 - Mood
 - Medication side effects
 - Hunger
 - Dehydration
 - Stress levels
 - Pain
 - Sleep levels
 - Illness

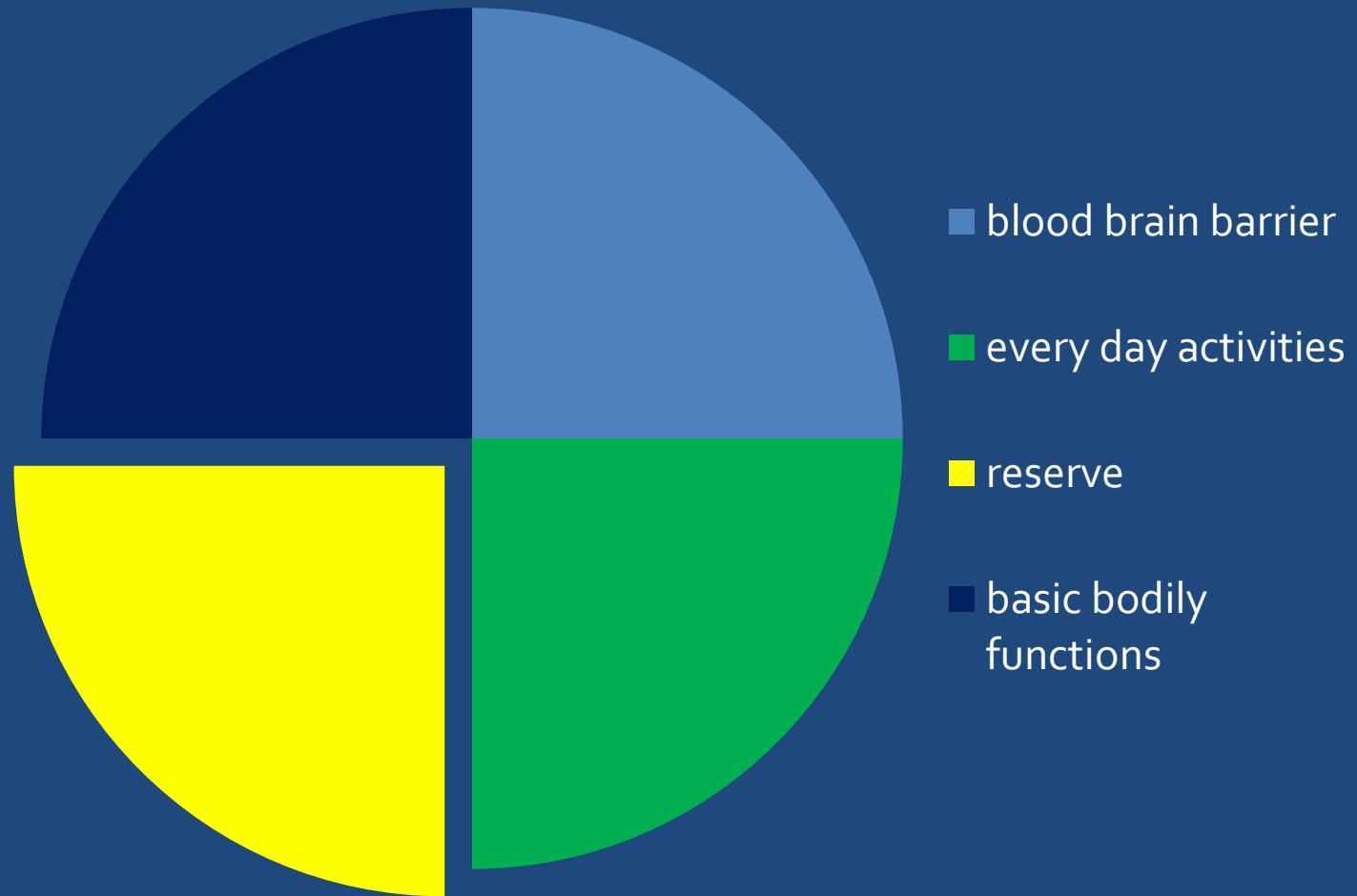
- **External Triggers:** things that are within your environment.
- **Examples:**
 - Bright lights
 - Noise
 - Busy environments
 - Room temperature
 - Life stressors
 - Not enough challenging activity
 - Too much challenging activity

SURPRISINGLY FATIGUING ACTIVITIES

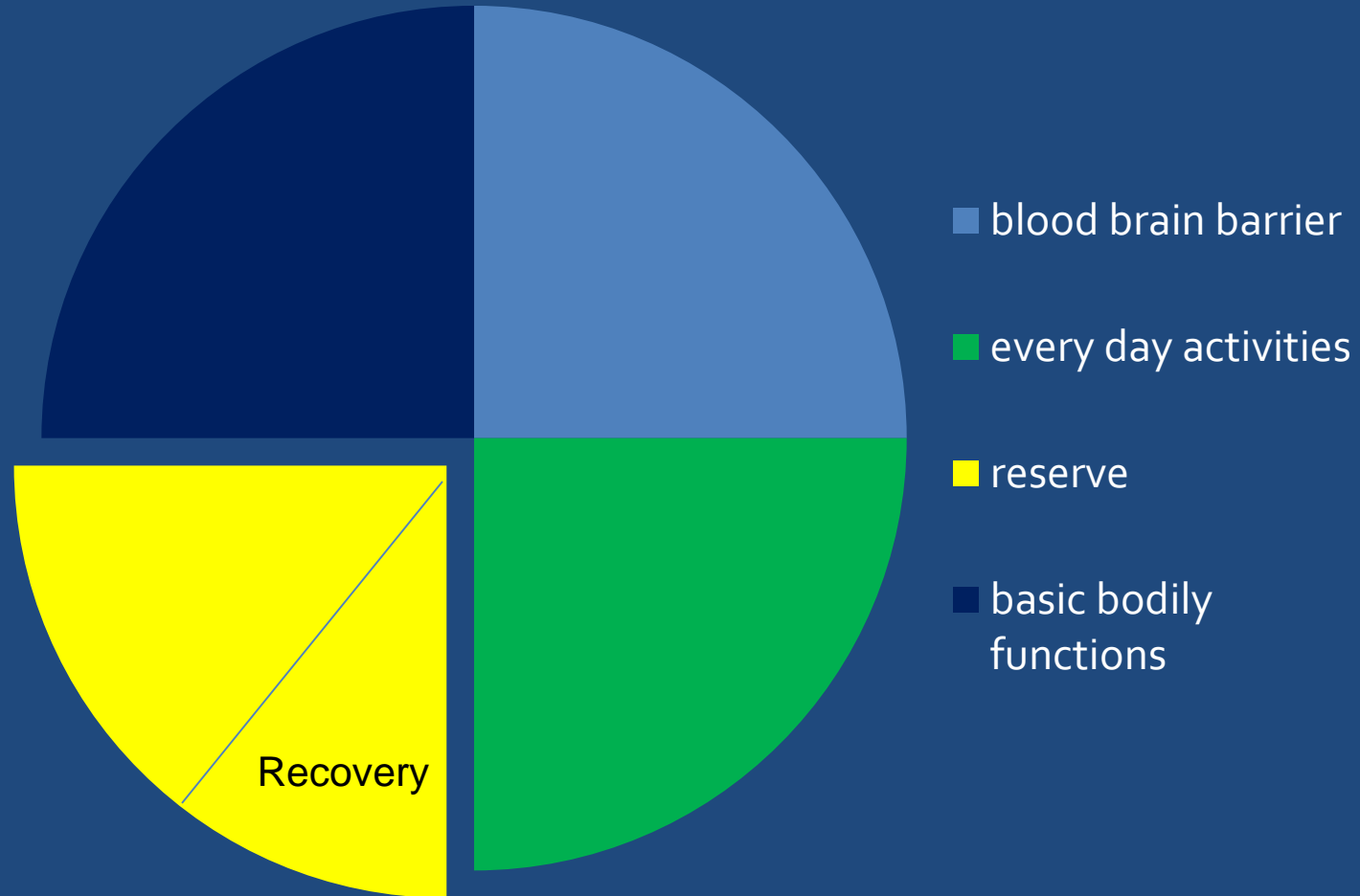


- Getting ready for the day
- Attending appointments
- Grocery shopping
- Driving
- Gaming
- Malls
- Paperwork
- Social functions
- Family dinners
- Spectator sports
- Restaurants
- Social media
- Telling their story

BRAIN ENERGY



BRAIN ENERGY FOLLOWING ABI



STRATEGIES



STRATEGIES TO MANAGE FATIGUE



- Front load rest
- Sleep
- Hydration
- Diet
- Pain
- Medication
- 5 P's- Prioritize, Plan, Pace, Posture and Patience
- Identify triggers
- Identify warning signs
- Allow extra time

PLANNING



- Planning can help make tasks more manageable and less stressful.
- In order to plan, individuals need to have an understanding of their own energy levels, limits and fatigue triggers.
- Planning is done by making decisions with these factors in mind.

Planning Tips:

- Plan to do activities when they have the most energy.
- Plan time for rest, exercise, leisure activities, and productive activities.
- Plan days/weeks to balance harder activities with easier ones



PRIORITIZING



Prioritizing means deciding *how* to spend your energy. It allows a person to make sure that they have the energy to do the things that are most important to them.

Prioritizing Tips:

- Write a list of all the things that *have* to be done and *would like* to do each day. Then go through the list and set 'priorities'
- Consider the following:
 - Does it have to be done today?
 - Can somebody help me or do it for me? *Delegate!*
 - Can anything be completely eliminated?
 - Learn to say "no"



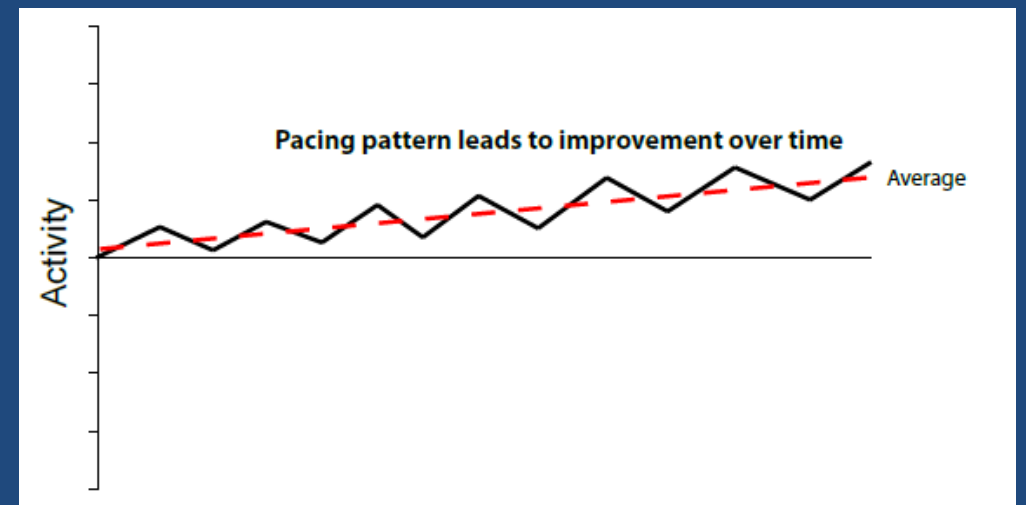
PACING



- Pacing is the key to maintaining energy levels throughout the day
- Pacing means balancing rest with work. It also means switching between harder and easier tasks.
- Pacing involves taking time to do activities and not rushing
- Pacing also involves taking rest breaks before becoming fatigued

Pacing Tips:

- Spreading strenuous activities throughout the week
- Breaking bigger tasks into smaller parts



PACING: WHAT IT MEANS TO TAKE A REST



- A pause between tasks or steps in a task
- Frequent short breaks may be more effective than 1 long rest
- In a place that is quiet, and free from interruptions or distractions (eg TV)
- It can be sitting or laying down in a comfortable position
- Close your eyes (do not read or watch television)
- It can be deep breathing, a mindfulness body scan or other relaxation techniques
- Do not use this time to think of what you need to get done.
- Sleep if necessary
- Try to allow at least 15 minutes relaxing. You may need to rest longer, depending on how tired you are. This amount of time will be different for each individual

PATIENCE



Learning fatigue management strategies and putting them in to practice will take time as it can be a change from how people used to do things or how they are currently doing things

Try a few recommendations and see what works best

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES



- **PLANNING:**

- Create a “bubble” when first go home
- Plan day/week
- Break down tasks
- Schedule breaks

- **PRIORITIZING:**

- Set priorities
- One big ticket item per day

- **PACING:**

- Learn your warning signs
- Pause between tasks
- Stop, Relax, Refocus
- Use timers

- **PATIENCE:**

- Estimate how long and double it

DAILY ROUTINE



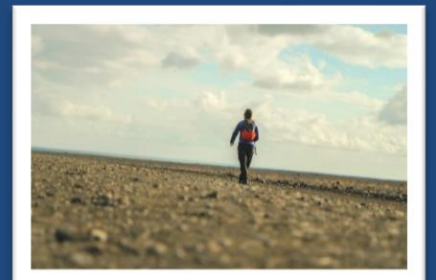
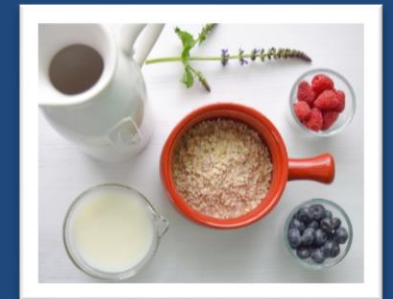
- A daily routine can make someone more aware of how they are spending their time (e.g. spending too long at one activity or spending too long resting)
- Helps ensure that rest periods are scheduled throughout the day
- Helps to ensure that there is a balance of strenuous or difficult activities with more restful activities.
- Reduces the amount of planning required (which uses energy). The repetitiveness of a routine can be helpful.
- Provides predictability which reduces the efforts memory and energy levels
- Allows someone to focus the use of their energy on other things
- Can assist with motivation, initiation, and sense of accomplishment

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES



- Regular wake up times and sleep times
- Morning routine (e.g. breakfast, shower and dress)
- Exercise (e.g. walking, yoga, gym)
- Regular meal times
- Regular rest times

- Time for productive activities (e.g. chores, errands, phone calls)
- Leisure time (activities that you enjoy doing)
- Time with family and friends
- Evening rituals to prepare your mind & body for rest



SUMMARY



- Fatigue post-ABI is very common
- There are physiological reasons why people experience fatigue (fixed energy principle)
- Small changes can have a big impact
- Regular energy conservation principles apply
- Pushing through fatigue can slow recovery
- People who learn to manage their fatigue tend to do better over all
- Takes patience and practice; consistency is key
- Start small and slowly grow

RESOURCES

- <http://www.nshealth.ca/sites/nshealth.ca/files/patientinformation/2065.pdf>
- <https://www.psychologytools.com/resource/pacing-for-pain-and-fatigue/>
- <https://braininjuryguidelines.org/concussion/fileadmin/media/appendices/appendix-2-2.pdf>
- https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0025/675052/fatigue_cl.pdf

Fatigue After an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)

Fatigue (feeling very tired) is common after an ABI. You may feel fatigued by physical activity, cognitive (thinking) tasks, or just everyday activities. If you have problems with mood, speech, concentration, memory, vision, balance, or coordination, fatigue can make them worse.

For most people, managing fatigue gets better over time. It is important to learn how to plan your daily tasks, so that you are getting the right amount of activity for you – not too much or too little. It is important to balance activity and rest to manage your fatigue.

What causes fatigue after an ABI?

You may have fatigue after an ABI because:

- › your brain is working harder than it did before
- › some of your energy is being used to help your brain recover
- › of other factors, such as medication(s), poor sleep, pain, stress, and/or depression

You may experience fatigue in different ways:

- › It may take you longer to do things.
- › You may feel physically worn out.
- › You may get frustrated or grumpy more easily.
- › You may find it hard to concentrate.
- › You may find it hard to do more than one thing at a time.
- › You may find that your thinking is slower and it is harder to get your words out.

Things that can make fatigue worse include:

- › trying to do too much
- › stress or illness
- › pain or headaches
- › poor sleep
- › noisy or busy places
- › not taking breaks
- › depression, anxiety
- › poor nutrition
- › too much or too little exercise
- › social events or crowds

Tips for coping with fatigue

- 1. Recognize the early warning signs and take breaks.**
 - › Learn your early signs of fatigue and stop to rest before you push yourself too far. These early signs may include slower thinking, clumsiness, grumpiness, or the start of a headache.
- 2. Pace yourself.**
 - › Set aside time to make a daily or weekly plan. Put your plan somewhere you can see it (for example, on the fridge). Plan rests between activities, and before and after you have a busy period. Switch between easy tasks and harder ones. Balance work and chores, physical activity, and things you enjoy.
- 3. Break big tasks into smaller parts.**
 - › Do part of a big task instead of the whole task at once, if you can break it up. For example, clean one room instead of the whole house, or mow the front lawn and leave the back lawn for later.
- 4. Be realistic.**
 - › Choose an amount of activity that you know you can handle. This increases your chance of success, and gives you energy to keep going. Avoid overdoing things when you are feeling good, as this often leads to worse fatigue later.
- 5. Plan WHEN you will do things.**
 - › Planning can help make tasks more manageable and less stressful. Do important and/or harder tasks when you have the most energy – this may be in the morning or after a rest. Plan to do these tasks when you don't have other things taking your attention or time. For example, avoid driving in rush-hour traffic and shop at less busy times – this will save time and energy.
- 6. Plan HOW you will do things.**
 - › Work in a quiet place when possible to reduce distractions and stimulation. When running errands, plan what you will do first, and take a list with you. For shopping, order over the phone or call ahead so things are ready when you get to the store. Buy prepared foods (e.g., pre-chopped veggies, frozen meals) or consider using a meal delivery service for awhile to save time and energy.

Resources

Brain Injury Association of Nova Scotia

- › Phone: 902-473-7301
- › www.braininjuryns.com

Concussion Nova Scotia

- › www.concussionns.com

211 Nova Scotia – a free helpline that connects you to community and social services in your area 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in over 150 languages.

- › Phone: 211
- › www.ns211.ca

QUESTIONS?