



Guest Editorial

Balancing Life after Concussion: An Update

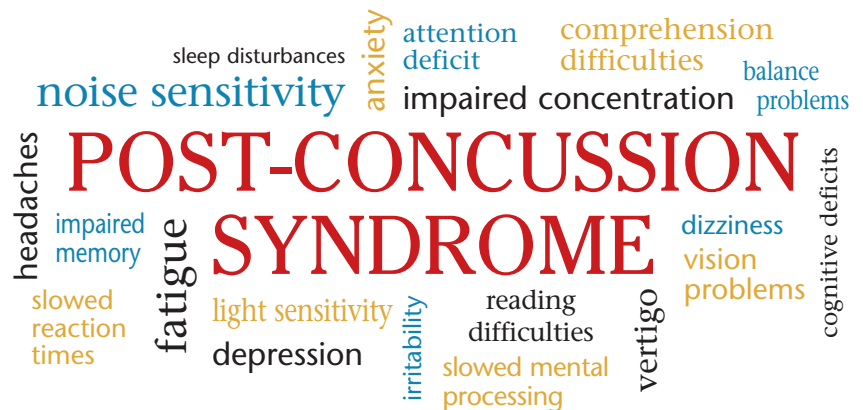
I'm a planner, a fact that is often complicated by having post-concussion syndrome whose symptoms can pop up without warning, destroying your best laid plans in the blink of an eye. Up until a year ago, I only ever had to deal with post-concussion syndrome and its symptoms within certain settings, settings I had been relatively familiar with prior to my injuries or that were somewhat within my control. College was going to change that in a very big way. So when it came to going away, I did my best to eliminate as many variables as possible.

I selected my college carefully, with input from both my family and my doctors. I chose a small school with the resources to help me succeed. Academic accommodations were set in motion, and with reports from my doctors, I was able to secure a medically issued single room so I would be able to manage my headaches and trouble sleeping, as well as a variety of other symptoms.

Despite my efforts to account for everything in my new life, I neglected to think about how I would inevitably have to discuss my post-concussion syndrome with the people who were a part of my every day. I was prepared to work around it as I always had

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Editor's Note: As a holiday gift to our readers, we continue our annual tradition of turning over the November/December editorial pen to a child or young person. This year we are most grateful to have Emily Thomas, who wrote our Guest Editorial in the 2013 November/December issue ("Life after Concussion: A Balancing Act," Vol. 39, No. 6, pp. 265, 299), update us on her life as a college student post-concussion.



before. I found, however, that creating an excuse for not being able to go to an amusement park was much easier than explaining how I was one of the few freshmen with a coveted single room.

This was a bit jarring and uncomfortable at first. I had been stuck in a cycle of not divulging the struggles of life with post-concussion syndrome to most people I interacted with. My experiences with both of my concussions and post-concussion syndrome seemed too personal to share on a conversational level, and I had very little confidence in other people's levels of understanding, especially people who were still relatively new to me.

As a result, I was forced to confront one of my biggest fears: every time I tried to start over, no matter where I went or whom I met, my identity would always be rooted in my post-concussion syndrome.

The possibility of that terrified me. But slowly, the terror melted away into a desire to be an individual, and with it, I found the ability to embrace post-concussion syndrome as a very formative part of my person, one that didn't have to be entirely

negative. It took a lot of trial and error, and error, and error to talk about it and not break down, to find the right words, and to not brush off the topic when others didn't immediately understand. It took self-reflection and many heart-to-hearts, and it's still painful, but being more open has helped me in more ways than it's hurt. I am more willing to ask for help than I ever was before, whether it be meeting with a professor or asking a friend to get me some Advil® and turn off the lights. I am using fewer accommodations in my second year and am taking classes in a field that I love. Post-concussion syndrome hasn't taken that away from me.

I'm grateful that I've finally reached this point, however imperfect life with post-concussion syndrome may be. I am me, not because I have post-concussion syndrome, but because I survived my injuries and because I master life with post-concussion syndrome a little more every time I do something I feel is vital to my success and well-being. And it really shouldn't have taken me more than five years to say that out loud. But it's never too late, right? ■