

# Voting Tips for People Living With Traumatic Brain Injury

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TBI Factsheet

This fact sheet explains why it is important to vote. It includes tips for people with TBI on when, where, and how to vote. Options and strategies may vary by state and locality, so be sure to check.

People with traumatic brain injury (TBI) may experience challenges in voting due to a range of impairments in physical, hearing, vision, communication, cognitive, emotional and behavioral function. Obstacles may include registering to vote, remembering to vote, accessing transportation, physically navigating the polling place, understanding ballot design and utilizing technologies for voting. All that on top of deciding who to vote for! The information here is intended to help people with brain injury overcome obstacles in the voting process. Options and strategies may vary by state and locality, so be sure to check.

## Why Vote?

- Voting gives you a voice in what happens in your city, county, state, and country.
- People with disabilities, including TBI, vote less often than people without disabilities. When this happens, people with disabilities have less of a voice.
- Your vote matters. If you do not vote, you are letting other people make decisions for you. Some of these decisions may affect your rights and access to health care, employment, and other services and opportunities.
- Voting is a privilege and a responsibility that is part of being a United States citizen.



## What Are Your Responsibilities?

- It is up to you to ask for help.
- It is up to you to be fully informed about the voting process and the candidates before voting.

## What Are Your Rights?

- You have the right to vote.
- You have the right to ask for help with voting.
- You have the right to bring a friend or family member with you to help you navigate the voting process.
- You have the right to have accommodations to help you vote.
- You have the right to ask a poll worker to explain how to use the voting machine.
- You have the right to ask for a voting machine you can reach.
- You have the right to ask for a seat while you are waiting to vote.
- You have the right to take your time while voting.
- You have the right to use curbside voting.
- You have the right to be treated with respect.
- You have the right to speak up for yourself.



The Traumatic Brain Injury Model System Program is sponsored by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, Administration for Community Living, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (See <http://www.msktc.org/tbi/model-system-centers> for more information.)

## How Do I Prepare to Vote?



- Register to vote.
- Decide where/how will you vote and how you will get there if voting in person.
- Confirm your voter registration.
- Even if you have registered before, you should verify your registration status and make sure the address listed is up to date.
  - Infrequent voters are more likely to be removed from voter rolls.
  - When you go to vote, if you are told that you are not registered or not allowed to vote, you have the right to ask for a provisional ballot.
  - In order for your provisional ballots to be counted, you must follow-up with the appropriate officials to provide proof of registration status.
- Set helpful reminders leading up to election day to remember to vote.
  - Write important dates on your calendar, set a reminder on your cell phone, and/or or ask someone to remind you as the dates approach.
  - Important dates include the deadline to register to vote and to request and turn in an absentee ballot. They also include the dates for early voting and for Election Day. These dates may be differ by state and precinct (voting region).
- Decide which elections matter to you.
- Become informed. (See suggestions on page 3)
- If you plan to vote absentee, request an absentee ballot to vote. Follow the directions that come with the ballot to complete it and turn it in. Consider having a family member or friend check that you completed it correctly and signed in the right places.
- If you plan to vote at the polls:
  - Make notes and take your notes with you when you vote.
  - Check on your state election board website to find out what kind of identification (ID) you need to vote.
  - Find out which polling place is your assigned location for voting.
  - Figure out how you will get to the polls. Plan for a ride if you need it.

Lines may be long on election day. Allow yourself plenty of time. If needed, bring things like water, medication, or food.

## Where Can I Register to Vote?

You can register to vote at a variety of places. Locations and processes vary by state. Check before you go to make sure that the location is doing voter registration. Find out what documents to bring. There are several registration options. Chose the option that is right for you. These options may include:

- In person.
  - County board of elections office.
  - Public libraries.
  - Department of motor vehicles.
  - State and county public assistance offices.
  - Post offices.
  - Town halls or municipal offices.
- Online.
  - Visit <https://www.usvotefoundation.org/>. This portal walks you through the process for each state. You can also check your county or state board of elections website.



## How Do I Become an Informed Voter?

- Decide what you care about. Learn about the issues. Learn about the candidates' positions on the issues and his or her leadership skills.
  - You can read newspapers, listen to the radio, watch debates on TV, and talk to other people.
  - Visit each candidate's website. These sites may list the candidate's views on different topics.
  - Read the Guide to Informed Voting.  
(<https://www.aascu.org/programs/ADP/VotingResources/InformedVoting.pdf>).
- Know who is running. Know what issues are on the ballot.
  - Get a sample ballot.
    - » You can get a sample ballot from your county board of elections office, early voting sites, libraries, or online.



## Where Do I Go to Vote?

Choose the way that is best for you. Options include:

- Vote from home using an absentee ballot or vote by mail.
  - You must request an absentee ballot before the election.
  - Follow the directions that come with the ballot to turn it in.
  - Start the process early to allow enough time for you to receive and submit your ballot.
  - Absentee ballots should be completed and placed back in the mail as soon as possible to be received by election day.
  - Most states also have options for drop-off boxes or in-person early drop-off.
- A place that offers one-stop early voting. This often starts 2–4 weeks before Election Day.
- Your assigned polling place on Election Day.
- Curbside at the polling site or your local elections office.
  - If you can't get out of your car or walk into the polling place, a poll worker can bring your ballot to your car.
    - » You will need to have a friend or family member go inside the polling place and tell a poll worker that you need curbside voting.



## What if I Need a Ride to the Polls?

- You can take public or private transportation to the polling place. Examples may include:
  - State-funded disability transportation
  - Transportation services for seniors
  - Churches
  - Private transportation services, such as taxi cab, Uber, and Lyft
  - Party headquarters (e.g., Democrat, Republican, or other) in your county
- Ask a family member, friend, neighbor, or someone else you trust if you can go with them to the polling place.



## What if I Need Help Voting?

- You can ask a poll worker for help.
  - **Poll workers can't ask you if you need help, but you can ask them for help.**
  - You can ask the poll worker to help you read the ballot and use the voting machine.
- You can ask someone to go with you and have that person ask the poll worker for help on your behalf.
- You can ask someone to go with you to the polling place and into the voting booth to help you.



## How Can Families, Friends, and Care Partners Help Me Vote?

- Talk about current events, political issues, and candidates with others.
- Think about obstacles that may keep you from voting.
  - These obstacles may include a lack of desire to vote, fatigue, and a desire to avoid crowds. Other examples include problems with memory, not being able to drive, and having a tough time moving around or communicating.
  - Plan each step of how you will vote, from getting your ballot to turning it in.
    - » If there are parts of the process that you don't know how they will work, research these issues and make a plan.
- Think about how you can get help to overcome obstacles to voting.
- Tell others that you want to register to vote, your preferred method of voting, and ask for their help if you need any.  
Ask for help with
  - registering to vote.
  - remembering deadlines (such as, dates for registering to vote and getting an absentee ballot).
  - gathering information.
  - learning about the candidates.
  - getting a sample ballot.
  - making sure you have the right ID to vote.
  - requesting or turning in an absentee ballot.
  - getting a ride to the polls.
  - getting into the polling place.
  - reading the ballot.
    - » Someone else can read the ballot and ask you to pick one of the choices. They can't pick for you.

## What about voting and COVID?

- If you vote at the polling place, bring a mask, hand sanitizer, and remember to social distance.
- You could request an absentee ballot if you are concerned about voting in person.



## Where Can I Get More Information?

- National Disability Rights Network
  - <https://www.ndrn.org/issues/voting/>
- American Association of People with Disabilities Voter Resource Center:
  - <https://www.aapd.com/advocacy/voting/voter-resource-center/>
- U.S. Vote Foundation online portal for registration, absentee ballots, election dates, and other information:
  - <https://www.usvotefoundation.org/>
- Election Protection coalition:
  - Toll-free at 866-687-8683 or online at [www.866ourvote.org](http://www.866ourvote.org)
- USA gov:
  - How to Register to Vote: [www.usa.gov/register-to-vote](http://www.usa.gov/register-to-vote)
  - Voting and Elections: [www.usa.gov/voting](http://www.usa.gov/voting)
- Guide to Informed Voting:
  - <https://www.aascu.org/programs/ADP/VotingResources/InformedVoting.pdf>
- U.S. Election Assistance Commission:
  - Resources for Voters with Disabilities: <https://www.eac.gov/voters/resources-for-voters-with-disabilities/>
  - Voter's Guide to Federal Elections: <https://www.eac.gov/voters/voters-guide-to-federal-elections/>



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## Authorship

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