



"AM I STILL ME?"

THE POST-TBI IDENTITY RECOVERY WORKBOOK

A GUIDED WORKBOOK FOR SURVIVORS WHO ARE FUNCTIONAL ON THE
OUTSIDE BUT LOST ON THE INSIDE

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A Note Before You Begin



From your guide: a TBI survivor, author, life coach, and gut-brain specialist.

There is a particular kind of loneliness that comes after a brain injury that nobody warns you about. It isn't the hospital loneliness. It isn't even the pain. It's the moment you look in a mirror and the eyes looking back at you are yours, but the person behind them feels like a stranger.

You survived. You were told you were lucky. And somewhere in the middle of learning to function again, you lost track of who you actually are.

This workbook is not about recovering the person you were before the accident. That person existed in a body and a brain that has since changed. This workbook is about something more honest and more powerful than that: figuring out who you are now, and building a self you can trust, live inside, and move forward from.

There are no right answers here. There is only your truth, written in your own words, at your own pace.

Take breaks. Drink water. Come back to it.

You are not broken. You are rebuilding.

How to Use This Workbook



This workbook has six modules. Each one addresses a different layer of post-TBI identity loss. You do not need to complete them in one sitting, one module per day or per week is completely valid.

Some prompts will feel easy. Some will stop you cold. If a prompt stops you, that is the one worth sitting with.

What you'll need:

A pen. Somewhere quiet. Permission to be completely honest.

What this workbook is not:

A medical document. A substitute for professional support. A promise that healing is linear.

What it is:

A structured conversation with yourself, possibly the most important one you've had since the accident.

MODULE ONE: The Before and After

Recovery isn't returning to who you were. It's meeting who you're becoming.

Understanding what actually changed, and separating fact from fear.

Every TBI survivor carries a "before and after" line, a specific moment where one version of life ended and another began. Before we can rebuild identity, we need to look honestly at what that line actually changed, versus what fear told us it changed.

Warm-Up Questions

Answer quickly, without overthinking. First thought, honest answer.

1. In one sentence, who were you the day before your injury?
2. In one sentence, who do you feel like you are today?
3. What is the biggest gap between those two sentences?

Question 1:

List every way you believe your injury changed you. Be specific. Not "I'm different", how are you different? Include physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and professional changes.

Question 2:

Now go back through that list. For each item, mark it with one of three letters:

F = This is a fact I can demonstrate (e.g. "I fatigue faster: I have evidence of this")

S = This is a story I've been told by someone else (a doctor, a family member, my own fear) that I have absorbed as truth

U = I genuinely don't know which this is yet

Most survivors find their list is a mix of all three. That's completely normal. The goal isn't to dismiss anything – it's to start seeing clearly.

Question 3:

Look at everything you marked S. For each one, write:

Who told me this? What were the exact words? Did I ever test whether it was true?

(This is where "you'll never earn more than X" money. This is where "permanently impaired learning ability" lives. Name them.)

Question 4:

Is there anything you've achieved, learned, or done since your injury that directly contradicts something on your S list?

Write every single one. Big and small. Getting dressed counts. Driving again counts. Finishing a course counts. Crossing a busy road counts.

Write it down. Then write one piece of evidence, even small, that it might not be completely true.

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Write it down. Then write one piece of evidence, even small, that it might not be completely true.

[illegible]

Reflection Prompt:

Complete this sentence in as many ways as you can:

"Before the injury I was someone who _____, and I now know that _____."

Example: Before the injury I was someone who *remembered words*, and I now know that *it takes me longer to find some words*.

Body Check-in:

This is your holistic gut-brain pause.

Before moving on, take 60 seconds. Close your eyes and focus on your breath, breath in slowly and deeply three times. Place one hand on your belly. Breathe slowly.

Ask your body: Where am I holding this module? Tight chest? Jaw? Stomach?

What does it feel like(a stone, a spikey ball, what colour is the emotion?

Write where you felt it. The body keeps score, and it often knows what the mind is still arguing about.

YAY! Module 1
complete!

MODULE TWO: The Performance of Capable

"Some days survival is the identity. Some days it's something bigger. Both count."

Most high-functioning TBI survivors become extraordinarily good at one thing: performing fine. You learned to cover the blank mid-sentence. You learned to laugh off the mistake.

You stopped telling people it was a brain injury because the word felt too big, too revealing, too permanent.

The performance kept you safe. It also kept you alone. This module is about understanding the mask, not ripping it off, but starting to see its edges.

Warm-Up Questions

Answer quickly, without overthinking. First thought, honest answer.

1. Who in your life knows the full truth of what your injury cost you?
2. Who believes you are "basically fine now"? How did they come to believe that?
3. When someone asks how you're doing, what do you actually say — versus what is actually true?

(For example: losing a word mid-sentence and smoothly substituting another. Nodding when you've lost the thread of a conversation. Blaming tiredness instead of naming cognitive fatigue.)

[illegible]

Be honest. Was it pity? Being seen as less? Losing your job? Losing someone's respect? All of the above?

[illegible]

Question Three:

What has the performance cost you?

Think about: relationships where people couldn't reach you because you were always "fine." Times you needed help and didn't ask. Times the exhaustion of performing on top of the already-exhausting work of having a TBI left you with nothing left for yourself.

If yes: what was it like to be seen by them?
If no: what would it feel like to let one person in?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on its right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

Question Five:

Complete this sentence honestly:

"I keep performing because if people saw the real version, they would _____."

Now look at that answer. Ask yourself: is that actually true? Or is it a fear you've been managing as though it were a fact?

Reflection Prompt:

Complete this sentence honestly:

*"The version of me that performs capable is protecting _____.
What I actually need is _____."*

The Gut-Brain Note:

Gut health after TBI

No doctors mentioned my gut. Turns out, while my brain was fighting to survive and rewire itself, my gut was going through its own quiet crisis...

Here's what I wish someone had handed me on day one.

Your gut and your brain are connected by something researchers call the gut-brain axis — a two-way communication line running between your gut bacteria and your central nervous system.

When a brain injury happens, that connection doesn't stay quiet. Research shows TBI triggers rapid changes in the gut microbiome, the balance of bacteria shifts, often within days of the injury. This is called dysbiosis. It's not a side effect that shows up later; it starts almost as fast as the brain injury itself.

Why does this matter for recovery? A few reasons:

- Your gut bacteria produce short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs): compounds that can cross the blood-brain barrier and may help fuel and protect an injured brain.
- Gut bacteria also produce neurotransmitters: including serotonin, dopamine, and GABA, the same chemical messengers involved in mood, focus, and emotional regulation.

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- When the gut is out of balance, it can drive inflammation, and inflammation is one of the things that makes the secondary damage after a brain injury worse, not just the initial impact.

So the disruption in your gut isn't separate from what's happening in your head. It's part of the same system. This is an area researchers are still actively working through, much of the strongest evidence so far comes from animal studies, with human research catching up, but the direction of it is consistent: an injured brain and a disrupted gut are dealing with the same fire, from two ends.

None of this means food fixes a brain injury. Nourishing your gut is one of the few dials you get to turn yourself, on a day when so much else about recovery feels completely out of your hands.

Where to start

You don't need a protocol. You need direction.

Start here:

Wholefoods over processed. Your gut bacteria thrive on fibre and variety. Vegetables, fruit, legumes, whole grains. The more processed a food is, the less your gut bacteria actually get to eat from it.

Ferments. Sauerkraut, kimchi, kefir, yoghurt with live cultures. These introduce beneficial bacteria directly. Start small, a forkful, not a bowlful, and build up.



Bone or meat stock. Rich in amino acids like glycine and glutamine, which support gut lining repair. A cup of good stock is a quiet, unglamorous act of self-repair.

Healthy fats. Your brain is roughly 60% fat by dry weight, and a lot of that is structural, myelin, the insulating sheath around your nerve fibres, is fat-dependent, and white matter damage is exactly the kind of injury a TBI causes. Oily fish, olive oil, avocado, nuts and seeds, egg yolks. This isn't about eating more fat generally, it's about making sure the fat you do eat is doing a job.

Consistency over intensity. One kale salad won't move the needle. A gut that gets fed well most days, over months, will.

Before you go all in

This isn't medical advice, and it isn't a replacement for whatever your treating team has you doing. If you're on medication, have a diagnosed condition, or things feel medically complicated, loop in your doctor before overhauling how you eat. Food is a support, not a substitute for the appointments you've already fought so hard to get. Honestly though doctors study nutrition for less than a few hours in their whole degree so its up to you to make the call.



Reflection

Take a minute with this one. There's no wrong answer.

1. Nobody told me about my gut after my injury. What's something about your recovery that nobody mentioned, that you had to find out the hard way?

2. What's one small, doable change you could make to how you eat this week, not a diet, just one shift?



3. Recovery often feels like it's happening to you. Where in this, gut health, food, nourishment could you feel like something is happening because of you instead?

Body Check-in:

This is your holistic gut-brain pause.

Before moving on, take 60 seconds. Close your eyes and focus on your breath, breath in slowly and deeply three times. Place one hand on your belly. Breathe slowly.

Think of the last time you performed "capable" when you weren't. Where did you feel it in your body afterward? What did it feel like (a stone, a spikey ball, what colour is the emotion?)

Write where you felt it. The body keeps score, and it often knows what the mind is still arguing about.

YAY! Module 2
complete!

MODULE THREE: Who Did the Injury Tell You That You Were?

"Healing isn't linear, but neither is becoming someone new. Both happen in loops, not lines."

Separating the injury's story from your actual identity

A brain injury doesn't just change function. It hands you a story about yourself, often delivered by doctors, by well-meaning family, by your own terrified inner voice in the hardest moments. You'll be severely brain damaged. Permanently impaired. You'll never earn more than X. You're lucky to be alive.

These stories can become identity. This module is about untangling what the injury said you were from what you actually are.

Warm-Up Questions:

1. What is the harshest thing you have ever said to yourself about your brain or your capabilities since the injury?
2. Did anyone else say something similar first? Who?
3. Have you ever defended yourself to yourself or out loud against these beliefs? What did you say?

(Examples: brain damaged. Slow. Broken. Burden. Lucky. Impaired. Stupid. Less than.)

[illegible]

Where did this come from? A doctor? The accident itself? My own fear? Someone who loved me but didn't understand?

Have I ever lived in a way that contradicts this label?

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[illegible]

(The survivor who notices what's funny. The person who figured out how to get home when they were lost. The friend who shows up. Look for the flickers.)

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"The injury told me I was _____. The truth, as best I can see it now, is _____."

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The Shame Map

Draw a simple diagram, it can just be words on a page. In the centre, write the word that holds the most shame for you about your injury or your brain.

Around it, write: where did this shame come from? Who reinforced it? What situations trigger it? What do you do when you feel it?

Then, outside all of that write one thing that shame has never been able to touch. One thing that has always been yours.

Gut-Brain Note

Shame is not just an emotion. It is a full-body physiological state, it activates the same stress pathways as physical threat. Chronic shame after TBI contributes to gut dysbiosis, heightened inflammation, and impaired neuroplasticity. The gut microbiome communicates directly with the brain's emotional regulation centres. Healing identity shame is not soft work. It is neurological work.

Body prompt:

When you feel shame about your brain, where does it land in your body first? Describe the sensation as precisely as you can.

YAY! Module 3
complete!

MODULE FOUR: What Your Body Knows

"Your comeback doesn't have to look like anyone else's. It only has to look like yours."

Rebuilding trust with the body that scared you.

Take a minute with this one. There's no wrong answer.

1. Do you trust your body? Why or why not?

2. When did you last feel safe in your body? Describe that moment.



3. Has your body ever surprised you positively since the injury?
Done something you didn't expect it could?

Question 1:

What are the physical signals your body gives you when you are approaching your limit? List them specifically.

(Heavy eyes. Tight jaw. Pins and needles. Irritability that arrives before you register tiredness. Gut discomfort. Noise sensitivity increasing.)

Most TBI survivors have these signals. Very few have ever written them down and named them as a communication system rather than a failure.

[illegible]

Question 3:

The gut-brain connection after TBI is significant and underappreciated. Answer these:

- How is your gut health? Do you experience bloating, irregularity, food sensitivities, nausea, or gut discomfort that worsened after the injury?
- Do you notice a connection between how your gut feels and how your brain feels on the same day?
- Are there foods that reliably make your cognitive symptoms worse? Better?
-

(This is not medical diagnosis – this is building self-knowledge.)

Movement and the healing brain. Answer these:

- What movement, if any, has helped you most since the injury? (Walking, swimming, gym, yoga, stretching – anything)
- Was there a specific moment where you noticed movement changing something in your brain – your mood, your fog, your energy?
- What gets in the way of moving regularly?

[illegible]

Question 5:

Write a letter to your body. Not a grateful gratitude exercise, a real one. Tell it what you've put it through. Tell it what you needed from it that it couldn't give. Tell it what it did do that you haven't acknowledged.

End the letter with one thing you are willing to do differently in how you treat it.

What would it look like to listen?

[illegible]

YAY! Module 4 complete!

MODULE FIVE: The Relationships the Injury Changed

"Your brain rewired itself to keep you alive. Now it's allowed to rewire itself to help you thrive."

Grief, distance, and the people who stayed

TBI changes relationships. Some people disappear, they don't know what to do with the new version of you, or the old version of you frightened them. Some people stayed but related to you differently, as fragile, as lucky, as recovered when you weren't.

And some people, a few, saw you clearly. In the mess and the anger and the confusion, they stayed anyway.

This module is about mapping those relationships honestly.

1. Who did you lose after the injury, not to death, but to distance?

[illegible]



3. Who do you still feel you are performing for?

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Question 2:

The people who stayed but changed how they related to you. Write about what that felt like. Being treated as fragile when you needed to be treated as capable. Being told you were lucky when you felt destroyed. Being seen as recovered when you were still fighting.

Question 3:

Is there a relationship in your life right now that is being held at arm's length because of what the injury taught you about people? What would it take to let that person in a little further?

What did they do that made it safe? What did it feel like?

If no one has done that yet, write about what you would need someone to do or say for you to feel safe enough to be seen.

[illegible]

"The relationship I most want to repair or deepen is _____, and what stops me is _____."

"The thing I most need people to understand about my experience that I have never said out loud is _____."

VAYI Module 5

YAY! Module 5 complete!

MODULE SIX: Who Are You Now – And Where Are You Going?

"You don't have to explain your brain to earn the right to change your mind about who you are."

Bringing the pieces together, and choosing what comes next

You've done the hard part. You've separated fact from fear, seen the edges of the mask, untangled the injury's story from your own, listened to your body, and mapped the people around you.

This last module is about putting the pieces together. Not back into the shape they were before, but into something you choose.

Identity after a brain injury isn't found. It's built, one honest decision at a time.

WARM-UP QUESTIONS

Answer quickly, without overthinking. First thought, honest answer.

1. What three words describe who you are today?
2. What have you discovered about yourself since the injury that you're quietly proud of?
3. What's one thing about who you are now that you wouldn't give back?

(You're looking for patterns, not perfection. Circle anything that feels like it's trying to tell you something.)

[illegible]



Question 2:

Your abilities may have changed. Your values didn't have to. List the things that still matter most to you, the things you'd fight for, protect, or build a life around.

(Honesty. Freedom. Family. Being useful. Adventure. Creativity. Fairness. Fun.)

Now circle the three that feel most like you.

Question 3:

Who are you now? Answer using only evidence: things you have actually done since the injury. Not hopes. Not "shoulds". Proof.

Complete this as many times as you can:

"I am someone who _____, because I _____."

Example: I am someone who doesn't give up, because I relearned how to _____ when I was told I couldn't.

Start with: "Dear me, I want you to know..."

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Question 5:

Big change is built from small steps your brain can actually take.

What is one thing you will do in the next seven days that the person you're becoming would do? Make it small enough that you can't talk yourself out of it.

Then write down:

What will I do?

When will I do it?

Who will I tell?

Write as many versions as you need. Then underline the one that makes your chest feel a little lighter.

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Body Check-in:

This is your holistic gut-brain pause.

Before moving on, take 60 seconds. Close your eyes and breathe in slowly and deeply three times. Place one hand on your heart and one on your belly.

Now read your Reflection sentence out loud. Notice what happens in your body as you say it. Does something soften? Tighten? Lift? What colour is it?

Write what you noticed. This is what it feels like when your body starts to believe you.

**YAY! Module 6
complete!**

Bringing It All Together



Look at what you've just done.

Module One: you separated fact from fear.

Module Two: you saw the edges of the mask.

Module Three: you took your story back from the injury.

Module Four: you started listening to your body.

Module Five: you mapped the people who matter.

Module Six: you chose who you're becoming.

Most people never have this conversation with themselves. You just had six of them.

Healing isn't a finish line. Some days it will feel like you've gone backwards. You haven't. Loops, not lines, remember? Every time you come back to these pages, you'll meet a slightly different version of yourself. That's the whole point.

Your Identity Statement



Pull it all together using what you've discovered across the six modules. Then cut it out and stick it somewhere you'll see it: the fridge, the mirror, the dashboard. Read it on the hard days.

My name is _____.

I survived _____.

I am someone who _____.

What I value most is _____.

My body is telling me _____, and I'm listening.

The people in my corner are _____.

Who I am becoming is _____.

A Final Note From Me



You picked up this workbook because something felt lost. Maybe it still does, a little. That's okay.

But here's what I know, from one survivor to another: the person who started Module One and the person reading this page are not the same. You looked at the hardest parts of your story and kept going. That isn't luck. That's you.

You don't have to have it all figured out. You just have to keep showing up for yourself, one honest answer at a time.

Come back to these pages in three months, six months, a year. Notice what's changed. Notice what hasn't, and be gentle with that too.

You were never broken. You were rebuilding.

And look at what you've built.

With love,
Kris