

Tips for Managing Thinking Problems

Brain Injury Information Sheet

Following a brain injury you may notice difficulties with memory, concentration and attention. You may also find that it takes longer to collect your thoughts and express yourself. These are some of the common thinking problems following a brain injury. Typically they improve with time but that does not make them any less annoying while you have them.

While you are recovering here are some practical strategies that you can use to help:

- ❑ Reduce distractions in your environment when you are concentrating. For example, turn off the television when you are trying to read; ask the children not to interrupt while you are making dinner
- ❑ Work on one task at a time. This helps to keep your focus and helps you from feeling overwhelmed
- ❑ Give yourself more time than usual to complete tasks. Work for short periods and take breaks. This will help reduce the stress that can impact on your ability to concentrate
- ❑ When concentration is critical for a task, pick a time when your energy level is at its best
- ❑ Avoid or limit your exposure to noisy, busy or overly stimulating places. It may be helpful to use earplugs when in a noisy environment or organize your workspace to minimize clutter and visual distractions. This will help you focus and it will reduce feelings of confusion
- ❑ To stay focused during conversations, maintain good eye contact with the person. Also repeat back what was said or ask the person to repeat the information if you missed it
- ❑ If reading is difficult, it can help to read aloud and read only for short manageable periods of time
- ❑ If you are forgetful, record important information in a notebook, a calendar, an organizer or even a tape recorder and keep it with you to use throughout your day. Make this a habit
- ❑ Keep items such as car keys, umbrella, calendar, message pad, cell phone or day timer in designated places
- ❑ Use lists for shopping. Use sticky notes around the house, for example at the door to remind you to check the locks, the stove, the iron etc. before you leave
- ❑ Use your answering machine or your computer e-mail to leave reminders for yourself
- ❑ Use external cues or prompts to draw you back to a task. For example use an egg timer or the microwave timer when cooking or doing laundry
- ❑ Some watches, cell phones and palm pilots have programmable timers to remind you things such as appointments, when to take medication, people to call etc.
- ❑ Use appliances that have automatic shut off, such as kettle or iron
- ❑ Write out a list of what you need to do and plan a schedule for the day, week and month at home and at work. Review your list and schedule every morning and update it as necessary
- ❑ To assist with organization, it can help to break the task down into manageable steps prior to starting the task
- ❑ Pre-planning your activities is useful. It helps you to be prepared to handle daily situations.. For example if you have a medical appointment write down your list of concerns and questions so you do not forget what you need to know. If you are driving somewhere unfamiliar plan ahead by having the address and a contact number with you and reviewing the directions before you leave

- ❑ Do not make decisions in haste. Be sure to take the time to review all possible perspectives of a situation and discuss the situation with someone you trust before deciding, especially if it is a significant decision
- ❑ Count to ten before you act on anything. Consider whether you are safe and whether you are using good judgment
- ❑ Remember that your thinking ability is affected by other symptoms such as headaches, poor sleep, dizziness, fatigue, low mood and stress. It is critical that you get a good restorative sleep at night and pace all of your activities to allow for rest periods throughout your day. As these symptoms settle down you will find that your thinking problems also settle down
- ❑ Be patient and have realistic expectations of yourself

It takes time and practice to use these techniques consistently but once you have formed the habit they will be very helpful in managing your thinking difficulties while you are recovering

Other Suggestions

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