

# FACT SHEET:



# ABIOS

Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service

**Category:**  
Cognition

**Audience:**  
Person with an ABI

For more information  
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ABIOS Neuropsychologist

## Attention and Concentration after Brain Injury

### Introduction

Attention and concentration are important areas of cognitive functioning that you rely on for most your daily activities and tasks. After a brain injury, people often experience changes in their attention and concentration.

### Different kinds of attention

- **Basic arousal** – basic alertness and awareness of what is happening around you
- **Sustained attention** – ability to stay alert and concentrate over a period of time
- **Selective attention** – ability to focus your attention on just one or two things or tasks without getting distracted
- **Alternating attention** – ability to shift attention back and forth between tasks or activities
- **Divided attention** – ability to focus on more than one thing at a time

### Problems you may experience include:

- Finding it hard to focus on a task
- Getting distracted easily
- Getting off the topic in conversations with other people
- Being unable to finish a task or get to the end of something
- Getting tired or fatigued very quickly
- Making mistakes or errors
- Taking more time to get things done
- Inability to do more than one thing at a time
- Difficulty understanding information or instructions if they are too complex or there is too much information
- Difficulty with memory and learning new information

### Alertness and energy

- Break down tasks into smaller parts and work on them one at a time.
- Focus – do tasks for a short time, rather than a long time.
- Plan more difficult tasks when you know you will be rested and have more mental and physical energy to get them done.

- Plan a variety of tasks to keep your interest and motivation
- Plan regular breaks and rest throughout the day
- Improve the quality of your sleep and physical health and fitness – the more you do regularly the more energy you will have in the long term.

### Sustaining attention

- Write yourself a list of tasks or things to keep on track
- Repeat things back to yourself or to others to confirm you have heard and understood the details
- Repeat key pieces of information you want to pay attention to e.g. names, places, dates or times.
- Use “self-talk” while you are doing a task to keep on track, e.g. “I am going to buy some shampoo and soap” or “I must pay attention to...”

### Selecting, focussing and dividing attention

- Get rid of as many distractions as possible when you need to concentrate. e.g. television, smart phones, radio. This is especially important when driving or operating machinery.
- Get rid of clutter in your workspace so you can find things easily e.g. office, kitchen, study area
- Try to avoid noisy or busy environments e.g. shopping centres, crowds, noisy restaurants.
- When you have been interrupted go back to your list to check where you were up to.
- Leave important items where you can easily see them and where they catch your attention e.g. on the kitchen counter, beside the front door.
- Leave visual reminders and prompts where you can see them to remind you to keep on track e.g. a sign or notes on the refrigerator or the bathroom mirror or the front door or a calendar or checklist.

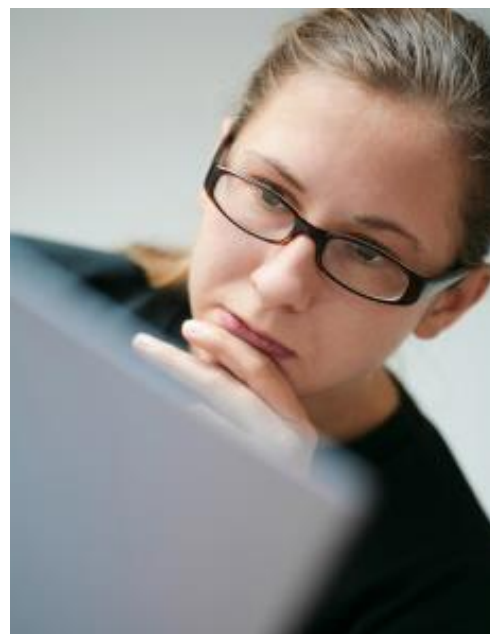
### Keeping on track

- Keep a list with you of what you are doing and tick it off when you do things
- Use alarms or reminders to keep you on track throughout the day at regular intervals or times. For example, use loud alarms to remind you when cooking (one you can carry in your pocket or on a belt), or a short time before you have to leave the house.
- Mobile phones are good for sending reminders and prompts.
- Have a plan for difficult or more demanding situations e.g. parties, social events, what you will say when you lose your train of thought, or when you need a break.

### Managing in the community:

#### At home

- Use a daily or weekly planner or calendar to keep on track
- Make lists of things to do
- Use shopping lists
- Use alarms, computers and “Post-its” as visual reminders to keep on track and especially for cooking, washing and other home-based tasks
- Put things where you can see them
- Group things together e.g. keys, wallet, mobile phone etc.



**At work**

- Plan your work tasks and day into smaller parts or chunks, and keep your plan with you
- Check your list/plan regularly
- Use prompts, alarms or reminders to keep on track with tasks
- Repeat and make sure you understand information from others
- Write down any new information
- Make sure you have medical clearance for driving, operating machinery, doing electrical work etc

**In social situations**

- Keep away from places with too many distractions e.g. find a quieter restaurant, or a small shopping centre
- Plan one-to-one or small group activities
- Talk to people about your difficulties, and ask them to slow down, repeat information, or to help you keep on track.

**In conversations**

- Have important conversations and discussions one-to-one, and where and when you are not likely to be distracted.
- Look at the person when they are speaking – concentrate on their eyes, face
- Rephrase or repeat back what someone has said, “So what you mean is ...”
- Ask for information to be repeated for you if you didn’t get it the first time
- If you get stuck, just let the person know “I’ve just lost track, tell me that part again”.



**Resources**

See other Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service (ABIOS) Information sheets at <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/abios/>

**Notes:**

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