

# FACT SHEET:



# ABIOS

Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service

**Category:**  
Cognition

**Audience:**  
Families and  
Support Workers

**For more information  
contact the Acquired  
Brain Injury Outreach  
Service (ABIOS)**

**PH: (07) 3406 2311**

**Email: [abios@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:abios@health.qld.gov.au)**

**Address: PO Box 6053, Buranda 4102**

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**Reviewed Aug 2017**

**For review Aug 2018  
ABIOS Occupational Therapist**

## Using Memory Strategies After Brain Injury

### Introduction

Memory is the ability to store, retain and recall information. It is a brain-wide process in which several areas of the brain act in conjunction with each other to recall past experiences. Generally speaking there are two types of memory; short-term memory and long-term memory. A major way to distinguish memory is through remembering things in the past, *retrospective memory*, and 'remembering to remember' things in the future, *prospective memory*.

After brain injury many people notice their memory does not work as well as it used to. Memory problems can affect a person's employment/education, relationships, quality of life and psychological wellbeing. There are many things you can do in order to compensate and even help restore memory function. Below are some strategies and facts to help you.

### External Memory Strategies

External memory strategies are tools which help compensate for memory impairment. When effectively used they can reduce day-to-day memory problems. There are many different strategies that can be used, so it is about finding the best one for you and the specific situations in your life. Some external memory strategies include:

- ◆ Daily Planner/ Notepad
- ◆ Calendars
- ◆ Laptops, smart phones, tablets and other electronic devices
- ◆ Whiteboards
- ◆ Lists / Checklists
- ◆ Medication blister packets from a Pharmacist
- ◆ Medication dosette boxes



**Daily Planner / Notepad**

Used to record/check information across several categories such as appointments, “things to do”, contact details, personal information and general note taking

**Calendars**

Used to record and check events across time (e.g. birthdays, future activities)

**Laptops / Smart phones / Tablets**

Various electronic devices using various Apps or software programs which can be used to record or check information, appointments and events; link information across devices and set alarms to help recall important events. Trials for functionality of devices, apps and software prior to purchase are recommended.

**Whiteboards**

Used to provide a larger and more visual representation of a daily planner/notepad but over a much shorter period of time (eg one week).

**Lists / Checklists**

Lists are used to record steps for specific routines (e.g. bedtime routine) or lists of items (e.g. shopping list)

**Medication blister packs**

The most common pre-packaged version of medication blister packs brands available is a “Webster Pack”. These are available from a Pharmacy and must be organised by your GP

**Medication Dosette Boxes**

Dosette boxes can also be used to organise medications. These are used to sort your own medication yourself, however some Pharmacists will pre-pack medication into suitable dosette boxes.

Daily planners, calendars and electronic devices are thought to be most useful types of external memory aids as they provide a means of tracking future events and retain detailed records of past events.

## Environmental Memory Strategies

Environmental memory strategies involve modifying the environment or the way you interact with the environment.

Environmental memory strategies can be used in conjunction with external memory strategies to help remind you to use specific external strategies.

Environmental strategies include:

**Having a Routine**

Can help with memory as tasks can become a habit after some time (e.g. writing your daily list of things to do with your morning coffee first thing in the morning)

**Everything having a place**

Effective use of this strategy will reduce need to “go looking for” or misplacing items (e.g. hook at front door for keys)

**Keeping things in sight**

By placing external memory strategies or various items in certain places that are used as visual cues to complete a task (e.g. placing pegs on the counter to remind you that the clothes are on the line)

Labelling drawers and cupboards with contents can help to prevent clutter while reminding of the existence of some items. This can help to prevent over purchasing

**Designating a point of organisation**

Using a desk and/or computer/filing cabinet to organise various affairs (e.g. bills)

**Avoiding a cluttered environment**

A cluttered or untidy environment may cause things to be lost more easily

Which external and environmental memory strategies work best will depend on the individuals needs and capacities.

## Internal Memory Strategies

Internal memory strategies can be described as **focusing** your attention in a particular way and being **mindful** of certain information. These strategies can be difficult to grasp and require lots of practice; however once mastered they can be very effective ways to remember simple, small amounts of information when you are in situations where you may not be able to record details to remember, for example someone's name. Some of these strategies include:

### Mental Imagery/ Visualisation

- ◆ Forming an internal 'visual image' to assist with learning and recall "visualising," "seeing in the mind's eye," "hearing in the head," "imagining the feel/smell/taste of"
- ◆ Remembering an experience without an external prompt
- ◆ Copying or reconstructing past experiences or imagining / anticipating possible future experiences

#### Example/Exercise 1:

Try to visualise where you have breakfast; the table, the plate, the cutlery, the food, what it smells like, moving your arms to put the food in your mouth, what it taste like, what you usually hear i.e. kids, TV, birds etc

#### Example/Exercise 2:

Rehearse in your mind or visualise your morning routine and all the tasks involved. Break each task down as much as you require to be able to complete the task yourself in your mind, that is, if you experience difficulty putting your top on, break that task down to every step that you would need to do in real life.

### Association

- ◆ This involves relating what you want to learn with something you already know
- ◆ It's the process of forming a link between visual information and verbal information, new information and prior knowledge and environmental cues and intended actions

#### Example/ Exercise 1:

Associate in your mind the person you have just been introduced to with another person you already know with the same name, whether it be a friend, family member or famous person

#### Example / Exercise 2:

If you are having trouble remembering something, it can be helpful to think of as much related information to the situation as possible. This increases the chance that you will trigger an association and remember what you were trying to remember

### Categorisation/chunking

Refers to organising or grouping separate pieces of information together

#### Example:/ Exercise:

Breaking your lengthy shopping list up into smaller categories "fruit and vegetables", "dairy", "cleaning products", "meats" etc

### Repetition/Rote learning

Trying to learn something that isn't meaningful by repeating it over and over

If you would like to know more about these strategies, do not hesitate to contact your ABIOS case manager or your Occupational Therapist.



## 4 Pillars of a Healthy Lifestyle

A balanced and healthy lifestyle is important for maintaining mental performance including memory. This can be accomplished through consistent exercise, good diet, adequate sleep and maintaining stress. It is important to understand that this balanced lifestyle is specific to a person's standards and capacities, as each person is an individual and every brain injury is unique.



1. **Exercise** helps by improving blood circulation, thus supplying extra oxygen to the brain and promoting growth of new brain cells.
2. By maintaining a good **diet** you can enhance your concentration and memory
3. Quality **sleep** helps you think more clearly, be more alert and function at your best in all areas; physical, mental and emotional.
4. Chronically high **levels of stress** are not only bad for blood pressure, cholesterol and other physical problems, but also wears away at brain fitness and overall memory performance.

### Acknowledgement:

ABIOS acknowledge the work of Kylie Radford, Miranda Say, Zoe Thayer, and Laurie Miller, in collaboration with the University of Sydney and Macquarie University for the development of the resource "Making the Most of Your Memory" used in the development of this ABIOS Fact Sheet.

### For more information and assistance:

- ◆ Contact your ABIOS Case Manager - 3406 2311
- ◆ ABIOS website - Memory and Learning after Brain Injury  
[http://www.health.qld.gov.au/abios/behaviour/people\\_abi/memory\\_abi\\_cl.pdf](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/abios/behaviour/people_abi/memory_abi_cl.pdf)

### References and Resources:

Radford, K. Say, M. Thayer, Z. Miller, L. (2010). *Making the Most of Your Memory*. Sydney, Australian Society for the Study of Brain Impairment

<http://www.human-memory.net/index.html>

<https://headway.ie/i-have-a-brain-injury/memory/>

<https://headway.ie/our-publications/living-changes-memory/>

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mental-imagery/>