

FACT SHEET:



ABIOS

Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service

Category:

Cognition

Audience:

Person with an ABI

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Memory and Learning after Brain Injury

Introduction

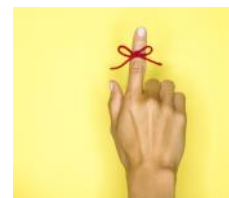
Memory is a complex function of the brain and it affects how you learn. Memory changes are very common even after a mild brain injury, often as the result of injury to the frontal and temporal lobes and the limbic system.

Different kinds of Memory

- **Working Memory** – Working memory is the system that processes new information from the world around us - what we see, hear, touch, taste and smell. Working memory is considered a very temporary storage of information e.g. shopping lists, numbers, things we are told
- **Short Term Memory** – short term memory is for day to day information, and often only last minutes, hours or days.
- **Long Term Memory** – is longer term, and reflects your ability to learn and store information e.g. knowledge of facts about yourself and the world, the physical skills you have learned (riding a bike). Long term memory is often unaffected by brain injury.

Problems you might notice after a brain injury related to memory

- Difficulty learning and remembering new information or skills
- Forgetting important details e.g. names, dates, or appointments
- Forgetting to take medication.
- Forgetting what you have already said/done
- Repeating yourself
- Asking the same questions over and over
- Forgetting to do things, or getting easily distracted onto other tasks or activities
- Forgetting how to get to places, or difficulty finding your way around e.g. when driving, or in shopping centres
- Forgetting how to do things e.g. cooking, fixing things
- Difficulty following instructions.
- Difficulty following the plot of a conversation, a book or a movie



Coping with Memory and Learning difficulties

Keep it Simple

- Information that is too complex or too lengthy will be hard to remember:
 - ◊ Do one thing at a time
 - ◊ Break new information down into smaller pieces
 - ◊ Break tasks into smaller steps
 - ◊ Have a routine or plan so you can keep on track with tasks and don't forget to do things

Using Memory Aids

Using all sorts of memory aids will help with remembering important tasks, activities, dates etc. Recording things using any of these options will help you to remember.

- **Diary** – use this for important appointments, dates, addresses and phone numbers and to plan
- **Notebooks** – used for writing down new information when you are out; good for shopping lists, or lists of things you need to do.
- **Calendars** – use these for getting a snapshot of the week or month ahead so you can plan for activities.
- **Making lists** – use these to keep on track, when you have more than one thing to do and you want to be organised. Lists are great for shopping & other tasks.
- **Corkboards and whiteboards** – use these for putting important information where you can SEE it. These are great for reminding about bills, appointments, and other events.
- **Laptops, tablets and smart phones** are great for storing lots of information and running the many Apps available to assist you to remember and organise information. All devices can be linked to each other and of course updated regularly. They will also provide you with alarms for appointments and activities e.g. pay bills, taking medications

Repetition will help

The more times you hear something, the more likely it is you will remember.

- Repeat information for yourself verbally, or write it down.
- Ask other people to repeat things too, especially if there is a lot of detail or new information.
- Practice a bus or train trip until it is very familiar to you.

Keep things where you can see them

- Try to put the things you use all the time (keys, wallet, phone) where you can see them e.g. on the kitchen bench, by the front door
- Put reminders in places where you will be likely to find them e.g. on the fridge, on the front door, or use a corkboard or whiteboard.
- Consider labelling the outside of drawers or cupboards to remind you of where items are stored to reduce the potential of clutter developing if too many items are left out so that you can see them

Everything should have a place

- Organise household items so you can find them easily e.g. where to find the scissors.
- Have storage systems for paperwork and other important information e.g. a filing system with labels to separate information e.g. bills, tax, health.

Drugs, Alcohol and Medication

- Alcohol can directly affect new learning and memory, so if possible stop or reduce how much alcohol you drink.
- Drugs such as marijuana will directly affect new learning and memory, and ongoing use is likely to lead to significant impairments in memory function.
- Some medications for treatment of epilepsy or pain may change your alertness and ability to concentrate and attend to new information. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about this.

