

Memory After an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)

Memory has many parts. It includes taking in, storing, and recalling information. Different types of memory include:

- › **Short-term memory:** information you remember for only a short time
- › **Long-term memory:** information you remember for a long time
- › **Prospective memory:** remembering to do something in the future

After an acquired brain injury (ABI), you may have changes in your memory. This is common. **Other things that might affect your memory include:**

- › Distractions (like noise, lights, or crowds)
- › Fatigue (tiredness)
- › Not getting enough sleep
- › Stress
- › Being sick
- › Pain
- › Depression and anxiety
- › Medication side effects
- › Drug and/or alcohol use

How might changes in my memory affect me?

You may find that you:

- › Forget important details (like names, dates, or information from a doctor's appointment)
- › Forget to pay bills
- › Forget to take your medication(s)
- › Forget where you put things
- › Forget things you said or did
- › Forget how to do things (like using a computer, fixing something, or cooking)
- › Have trouble following the story in a movie or a book
- › Have trouble following instructions or a conversation
- › Have trouble learning something new

Tips for managing your memory

- 1. Focus on your wellbeing.** Healthy habits support brain function, including memory. Try to:
 - › Get enough sleep
 - › Manage your stress
 - › Eat healthy foods
 - › Get regular physical activity
- 2. Use organization and routine.**
 - › Have a certain place for important items you use a lot (like your keys, wallet, glasses, and cell phone). Always put them back in their place.
 - › Follow a routine. When activities are routine, you are more likely to remember them. For example, take your medication(s) at the same time that you have your coffee each morning.
 - › Put up a whiteboard, corkboard, or calendar where you will see it. Use it to remind you of appointments, things to do, or bills to pay.
 - › Use storage systems with labels for important items (like a filing system for bills, tax information, and legal documents).

3. **Use external memory aids** (things around you that can help you to remember information). Most people use external memory aids even if they do not have a memory problem. External memory aids include:
- › Calendars (paper or electronic)
 - › Wall charts
 - › Day planners
 - › Sticky notes
 - › “To-do” lists
 - › Technology (like smartphone apps, Bluetooth® trackers, smartwatches)
 - › Notebooks and journals
 - › Timers
 - › Medication boxes or blister packs
4. **Use internal memory aids.** Internal memory aids are mental tips or tricks to help you remember small amounts of information when you are not able to record them. Relating information to things that you already know will help you to recall it later. Try to:
- › Use as many senses as you can to take in information. For example, read information out loud so you see it and hear it.
 - › Break large amounts of information down into smaller groups (like phone numbers, which are grouped: 555-555-5555).
 - › Repeat information in your head or out loud.
 - › Connect new information that you are trying to remember to information you already know. For example, try to connect the name of a person you just met with the name of someone you already know, like a friend or a famous person.
 - › Make a picture in your mind of the information you are trying to remember.
 - › Make up a funny or silly story or rhyme about information you want to remember.

Resources

- **Memory and Learning after Brain Injury** – Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service
 - › <https://library.nshealth.ca/memory-learning-after-ABI>
- **Using Memory Strategies After Brain Injury** – Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service
 - › <https://library.nshealth.ca/memory-strategies-after-ABI>
- **The Brain Injury Workbook: Exercises for Cognitive Rehabilitation, Second Edition** – Trevor Powell. (2017). Taylor & Francis Group
 - › <https://library.nshealth.ca/brain-injury-workbook>

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

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