

Information on attention



ATTENTION

Everyone has to screen out distractions to focus on what they want to do. If anyone is tired or worried it can be harder to concentrate; mistakes happen or the temptation is to give up before finishing. Everyone has poor attention at times and can seem 'miles away'.

After a brain injury different parts of the brain can be affected. Some of these parts:

- Keep you alert
- Help you focus attention
- Help you switch attention rapidly
- Help you deal with distractions
- Help keep you going.

So you may not be able to do some things as well as before. It might be harder to:

- Keep track of what people say or what you read
- Do two things at once (for example, answer the phone and write a note at the same time)
- Deal with the same amount of information quickly.

In addition you are likely to get drowsy or tire easily. This often happens when great effort is needed to relearn how to do something like dressing, which you used to do 'without thinking'.

What you can do

It can be helpful to:

- Cut down background noise (so turn off the TV or radio)
- Build concentration gradually, for example, start

reading for 5 or 10 minutes a day. Over the weeks increase this step by step until you can read comfortably for half an hour or more

- Plan to do things that need most concentration at your best time of day.

What others can do

It is important not to expect too much at first. Organise activities together (even just conversations) so there are not too many different things going on at once. Pick a good time to arrange things which are more important - for example, when the person is least distracted and when he or she has rested.

As things become easier and more straightforward it is worth increasing the challenge. Discuss with him or her how to make the tasks a little more difficult, for example, by increasing the number of decisions to be made or the length of time spent on a task.

Where to get more information

Further help and information is available from the clinical psychologist who will be happy to arrange an appointment to see you if you wish. Your nurse will also be able to give you advice.

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