Memory and Learning after Brain Injury

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 include:
- Difficulty learning and remembering new information or skills.
- Forgetting important details e.g. names, dates, 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 on TV.

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. Writing things down in any will help memory.

- **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.
- **Calenders** – 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 organized. 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 putting bills, appointments, and other reminders.
- **Computers and electronic gadgets** – are great for storing lots of information. Small electronic organizers can be taken with you and updated regularly. They can also be programmed to remind you about appointments, and to finish activities e.g. pay a bill.

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.

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 and 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 marihuana 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.

Structure and Routine
Having an organized life can help take the load off memory and learning. When activities are routine, it is more likely you will remember them.
Examples of this could be:
• Taking medication at the same time every day
• Having a routine for getting out of house and locking up
• Shopping and bill paying on certain days
• Putting your paperwork and bills in a filing system

Resources
See other Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service (ABIOS)

Memory Strategies I am Already Using

1. _______________________
2. _______________________
3. _______________________
4. _______________________
5. _______________________

Memory Strategies I Would Like to Try

1. _______________________
2. _______________________
3. _______________________
4. _______________________
5. _______________________

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