

## Attention After an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)

Attention (focusing on things around you) helps you to do your daily activities and tasks. It is an important part of thinking. Problems with attention are very common after an ABI.

Problems with attention can affect how well you can:

- › focus on something without getting distracted.
- › stay alert and focused over a period of time.
- › shift your focus back and forth between 2 things.
- › focus on more than one thing at a time.

### You may experience attention problems in different ways:

You may find it hard to:

- › focus on a task or activity (e.g., reading a book, watching a movie)
- › ignore distractions (e.g., noise, conversations nearby)
- › follow what others are saying
- › stay on topic during conversations
- › finish tasks
- › do things quickly
- › do things well without making mistakes (e.g., filling out a form)
- › do more than one thing at a time (e.g., cooking while having a conversation)
- › learn and remember new info
- › get back to a task after being interrupted

### Things that can make attention problems worse include:

- › being tired, sick, or in pain
- › feeling stressed, worried, or sad
- › drug and/or alcohol use
- › being very excited or happy about something

### Tips for coping with attention problems:

#### 1. Make sure you understand.

- › Repeat back what someone says to you to make sure you heard it correctly. Ask for info to be repeated if you did not get it the first time.

## **2. Pace yourself.**

- › Work for a short time and then take a break. Plan rests regularly and as needed during the day.

## **3. Break big tasks into smaller parts and use strategies to stay on task.**

- › Make a list of the steps needed to do a task and check off each step as you do it. Set an alarm to make sure your focus does not drift from the task. If you start thinking about something else while doing a task, write your thought down so you can come back to it later.

## **4. Be realistic.**

- › Choose only activities that you know you can handle. Plan activities with just 1 or 2 other people.

## **5. Plan WHEN you will do things.**

- › Planning can help make tasks more manageable and less stressful. Do tasks that take focus when you are feeling most alert and don't have other things taking your attention. For example, try to avoid places that are noisy or crowded, and shop at less busy times. In noisy or crowded places, wear earplugs or sit in a corner of the room and face away from the crowd.

## **6. Plan HOW you will do things.**

- › Work in a quiet place when possible to reduce distractions and stimulation (e.g., keep your home tidy and uncluttered, keep only what you need to do the task in front of you, turn off the TV and phone). If someone interrupts you, write down what you were doing before you were interrupted so you can go back to it after. Only work on one task at a time.

## **7. Take care of your health.**

- › Eat well, drink lots of water, get enough sleep, and exercise regularly.

## **Resources**

### **Brain Injury Association of Nova Scotia**

- › Phone: 902-473-7301
- › [www.braininjuryns.com](http://www.braininjuryns.com)

### **Concussion Nova Scotia**

- › [www.concussionns.com](http://www.concussionns.com)

**211 Nova Scotia** – a free helpline that connects you to community and social services in your area 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in over 150 languages.

- › Phone: 211
- › [www.ns211.ca](http://www.ns211.ca)