

## Attention After an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)

- Attention is an important part of thinking. Being able to focus helps you do your daily activities and tasks. Attention problems 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 1 thing at a time.

**Attention problems may show up in other ways.** You may find it hard to:

- › focus on a task or activity (like reading a book or watching a movie).
- › ignore distractions (like noise, or people talking nearby).
- › follow what others are saying.
- › stay on topic during conversations.
- › do things fast.
- › do things without making mistakes (like filling out a form).
- › do more than 1 thing at a time (like cooking while talking with someone).
- › learn and remember new information.
- › get back to a task after you were interrupted.
- › finish tasks.

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

- › Being tired, sick, or in pain
- › Feeling stressed, worried, or sad
- › Using alcohol or other substances
- › Being very excited or happy about something

## Tips for coping with attention problems

### 1. Make sure you understand.

- Ask for things to be repeated if you do not understand. Repeat back what someone says to make sure you heard it right.

### 2. Pace yourself.

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

### 3. Use strategies to stay on task.

- Make a list of the steps needed to do a task. 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.

- Only do activities that you know you can handle. Plan activities with just 1 or 2 other people.

### 5. Plan when you will do things.

- Planning makes tasks easier to manage and less stressful. Do tasks that take focus when you have the most energy or are the most alert.
  - › 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, so there is less distraction and stimulation (keep your home tidy and free of clutter, keep only what you need to do your task in front of you, turn off the TV and phone).
- If someone interrupts you, write down what you were doing so you can go back to it after. Only work on 1 task at a time.

### 7. Take care of your health.

- Eat well.
- Drink lots of water.
- Get enough sleep.
- Exercise regularly.

## Resources

### Brain Injury Association of Nova Scotia

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

### 211 Nova Scotia

- A free community helpline.
- › Phone: 211
  - › [www.ns211.ca](http://www.ns211.ca)