

Attention, Concentration, Memory and Thinking

Illawarra Brain Injury Service



Health
Illawarra Shoalhaven
Local Health District

A concussion / mild traumatic brain injury (mild TBI) can damage brain cells that can take days, weeks and even months to repair. In a concussion/ mild TBI, brain cells are typically damaged, rather than “broken”. The goal is to give them the right support to repair over time from this injury. Damaged brain cells need time to recover and function like they did prior to the injury.

After a concussion / mild TBI some people experience difficulties with attention, concentration, memory and thinking. Examples include:

- Attention drifting from what we are focusing on
- Struggling to hold onto new information
- Forgetting information quickly
- Feeling overwhelmed if too much information is coming at one time (e.g. in a group conversation)
- Difficulty doing two things at once.



These symptoms are very common and in most cases will resolve over time. A lot of people will describe these generally as feeling like you have to put more effort into thinking. This can be a difficult thing to adjust to, even temporarily. It can also make you mentally tired, and you may need more rest. Some people will consciously overwork their thinking skills more to attempt to rebuild them. But this is like overworking a damaged muscle. Let recovery occur over time by using thinking skills sensibly. Allowing for rest is a better strategy for recovery than overusing your thinking skills. As you recover, you can gradually do more over time.

The changes experienced after a concussion / mild TBI can also affect our self-confidence. When we feel like we are not “thinking” like we usually do, this can create anxiety and worry. It can also lead to us to constantly look for signs of problems, further increasing our worry.

It is important to accept these changes and look for ways to use strategies to help.



Useful ideas to use while your thinking skills are recovering:

- Reduce distractions (e.g. background noise) when trying to learn new information
- Reduce the amount of information you need to pay attention to at one time
- Take rest breaks as possible (before you get mentally tired)
- Keep information short and use repetition
- Write things down or record information
- Use lists
- Try not to have time pressure on tasks
- Do one thing at a time
- Break complex tasks into simple steps
- Seek help to come up with and check ideas when solving problems
- Don't make important decisions on your own
- Be kind to yourself. Judging yourself whilst injured can make you feel worse and prolong your recovery.

Remember the brain needs time to recover from even minor injuries. This is especially true if you are older or have had previous concussions / mild TBI's.

The majority of people do not need direct therapy to improve their thinking. These skills naturally recover over time as impaired brain cells gradually repair.

Once you feel your skills are improving, gradually increase what you do. The goal is to allow the gradual return of your thinking skills over time without getting too tired.



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