

Memory following an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)



*Information Guide for people
with Acquired Brain Injury and
their families and friends*

Difficulties with **memory** are one of the most common problems that people describe following an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI).

What is 'memory'?

Memory is not one 'thing'. It is a process which includes the ability to attend to, encode (store), retain and recall information. We use memory constantly in our daily lives. Following an ABI, long-term memories usually remain unchanged while short-term **memory** or new learning are more commonly affected.

Different Types of Memory

Orientation

This is knowing where you are, the time, date and year.

Working memory

This type of memory enables a person to take in and to remember information for a short time and to use the information, for example, remembering a phone number long enough to dial it.

Recent memory

This is where we process information long enough for it to be used for a few minutes or hours, for example, remembering conversations, messages or shopping lists.

Delayed memory

Delayed memory is the information that we recall after days, weeks or months. For example, remembering the specific details of a news story the next day.

Episodic memory

This includes memory for personal information and events in a person's life. For example, remembering childhood events or important personal events.

Semantic memory

This refers to a person's memory for factual information and general knowledge. For example, knowing and recalling that Mount Everest is the tallest mountain.

Memory following an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)

Procedural memory

This relates to recalling how we do tasks. For example, remembering how to ride a bicycle or making a cup of tea.

Prospective memory

This refers to a person's ability to remember to do something in the future - remembering to remember. For example, remembering to take medication or remembering to attend an appointment.

How our memory works

We currently understand that our memory systems can be divided into three main areas:

- Encoding: taking the information in
- Storage: Holding the information in mind
- Retrieval: Getting the information out when needed

Following an ABI, a person can have difficulties with any of these three areas.

These difficulties can sometimes improve over time, particularly early on in a recovery after ABI. However, difficulties with memory can often last a long time following ABI.

There are a number of useful strategies that can be used to help manage difficulties with different aspects of memory. These include both internal and external strategies.

Internal Strategies

- repeat and rehearse information
- prioritise information to be remembered
- use visualisation and verbal cues to learn new information
- use acronyms or mnemonics that are easy for you to recall
- categorise information into groups – chunking

External Strategies

- use a memory book, diary, wall planner or calendar
- make a to-do list
- use reminders or alarms
- get a daily planner
- get organised, identify a "Central Information Point" in your home where you keep all your personal belongings and important information such as keys, phone, diary.

