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**Headway:** <http://www.headway.org.uk/home.aspx>  
: free helpline = 0808 800 2244

**CogniFit:** [www.cognifit.com](http://www.cognifit.com)

**Brain and Spine Foundation:** [www.brainandspine.org.uk/helpline/patients\\_perspective/living\\_with.html](http://www.brainandspine.org.uk/helpline/patients_perspective/living_with.html)

**Helpguide.org:** [www.helpguide.org/life/improving\\_memory.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/life/improving_memory.htm)

**BBC Health:** [www.merckmanuals.com/home/brain\\_spinal\\_cord\\_and\\_nerve\\_disorders.html?qt=&sc=&alt=](http://www.merckmanuals.com/home/brain_spinal_cord_and_nerve_disorders.html?qt=&sc=&alt=)

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Sur demande, ce document peut être fourni en d'autres langues et formats.

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در صورت درخواست این سند به زبانها و شکلهای مختلف در اختیار شما قرار می گیرد.

یہ دستاویز دیگر زبانوں اور مطلوبہ شکلوں (فارمیٹ) میں بھی دستیاب ہے

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### Further sources of information

Our website: [www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk](http://www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk)

### Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

**King's Mill Hospital:** 01623 672222 **Newark Hospital:** 01636 685692

**Email:** [sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net)

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email [sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net). This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you. External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them.

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet, please email [sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net) or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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**Sherwood Forest Hospitals**  
NHS Foundation Trust

## Patient information

# Advice for changes in thinking processes in neurological conditions

### Neuropsychology Services



**Healthier Communities,  
Outstanding Care**

## What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet aims to explain some of the changes in thinking processes that people with neurological conditions often experience. Problems in **memory**, **concentration**, **processing speed**, and **executive skills** are common.

This leaflet will provide you with an overview of possible areas affected by these neurological conditions and strategies to promote self-care.

## Memory

Problems regarding memory tend to affect short term or recent memory. For example, you may go into a room for something but then forget what it is you wanted or you may forget a conversation you had 20 minutes ago.



### Advice for you:

- Try to keep things you often misplace such as keys or phones in the same place.
- Use diaries, make 'To Do' lists setting reminders, either in writing, on a computer or phone.
- Use memory aids such as post-it notes.
- Write down important information and 'key facts'
- 'Chunking' is a useful technique. Break down information into manageable blocks to retain and recall.
- Relate new information to your existing knowledge. This will help you understand and remember it.
- Create a weekly timetable. Try and do activities on the same days each week.
- Don't be afraid to ask people to repeat themselves.
- Don't panic if you are stuck, **stop and think**, giving your full attention.

If you think these areas could be affecting you, it may be worth making lifestyle changes or seeking help from professionals to improve them.

## Having a structured day helps

Routine is key to helping you achieve structure in your daily life. It can help maintain a healthy balanced lifestyle and improve your concentration and motivation. Once you get into the habit of a routine, you know what to do and when. This makes it easier to achieve what you need to do.

- Sleep routine - have a regular time for going to bed and getting up. This sets an internal clock and trains your body, making it easier to get to sleep and to wake to start your day.
- Plan activities - try to make it so 'getting ready' routines, such as medication, dressing, shopping, going for a walk etc. happen around the same time each day.
- Pace the level of your activity - switch between active and rest periods. Alternate physical and non-physical activities - for example, pay bills on the computer then go for a walk.
- Try to eat at the same time everyday as this helps keep your blood sugar constant and provides consistency. Diet and exercise maintains a healthy weight and gives you energy but also improves strength, fitness, concentration and mood.

## Be prepared; - tasks will require

- More effort.
- Practice to allow you to reduce the effort required.
- Prompts to trigger thoughts and activity.
- Structure, support and routine.

Try to find which of these hints and tips work for you. Although your abilities may have changed, you will give yourself the best chance of achieving what you need to do by adopting these tips.

## Processing speed

Your ability to think and react quickly may have changed. It may take longer to make sense and process information. This means you may take longer to answer questions, have difficulty understanding conversation at normal pace. There may be a delay between thinking of a task and actually carrying it out.



### Advice for you:

- Try to focus on key issues or words.
- Pay particular attention in situations where you have to 'think on your feet'.
- 'Train the brain' - practice small achievable tasks. Use Apps.
- Give yourself permission to take longer, be patient.
- Take notes for important conversations.
- Use fatigue management.

### Advice for the carer:

- Allow time, for people to respond.
- Give information in chunks. This is easier to process and remember.

## What can make 'thinking problems' worse?

The following factors may affect your cognition:

- Tiredness or fatigue
- Low mood/depression
- Lack of sleep
- Stress and anxiety
- Alcohol
- Medication

### Advice for a carer:

- Break down tasks to be completed one stage at a time.
- Give verbal and physical cues and prompts.
- Provide context when jogging people's memory.
- Be patient, avoid confrontation.

## Attention (includes concentration, keeping on track and multi-tasking)

You may find it hard to concentrate for long periods, have trouble keeping track of what you are doing, finishing tasks or doing two things at once. For example, making a cup of tea while someone is talking to you.

### Advice for you:

- Do one thing at a time and reduce distractions.
- Have simple goals and take breaks.
- Do activities in a quiet place and have enough light.
- Do things that need a lot of attention when it is best for you i.e. when you feel most alert and not tired.
- Practice doing things that are hard for you by breaking them down into stages.

### Advice for a carer:

- Ensure you have people's full attention before asking questions.
- Simplify choices to yes/no if possible.
- Avoid interrupting or distracting people from a task.
- Have realistic expectations.

## Executive skills (includes decision-making, problem solving, initiating activity, generating ideas, organising, planning and getting motivated)

You may struggle to think ahead and carry out a task, for example getting dressed, driving or going on a shopping trip. Some tasks may feel as though it is the first time you are doing them and may take longer. You may know what you want to do but are unsure where to begin, or find it hard to work out the steps needed to reach that goal.

### Advice for you:

- Self monitoring is important. Pay attention to when you make a mistake and check back for errors.
- If you make frequent errors take a step back and try to recognise them and then do it differently.
- Reduce distractions around you when trying to complete a task.
- Avoid switching tasks too quickly as this can be confusing.
- Use prompts, calendars and diaries to help plan and organise yourself and your activities.
- Work through tasks with a carer and note down their way of doing things.
- List jobs that need to be completed, numbering them in order of priority.

### Advice for the carer:

- Provide personal and relevant prompts .
- Encourage evaluation time (asking themselves how am I doing) to eliminate the possibility of errors.
- Help generate problem solving ideas and provide choices.

## Word finding

Memory difficulties can affect word finding. You may experience trouble in finding the right word you wish to use - 'it's on the tip of my tongue' but just cannot say it.

This may affect your opportunity to engage in conversation as it takes too long to think of a word or express your opinion.

### Advice for you:

- Remember that getting the message across is the what really counts. Don't worry too much about using 'the right word'.
- Describe the word you wish to use and try to get a picture of it in your head.
- Use self cues - letters of the alphabet, first letter of the word and categories it may belong to.
- Use key words: *What, when, where, why and how* to think of your sentence order.

### Advice for the carer:

- Try not to interrupt and be patient.
- Avoid finishing sentences on people's behalf. This may deter them from searching for a suitable word.

