

FACT SHEET



Cognitive Changes After Brain Injury Planning and Organization

QUICK FACTS

- Planning refers to the ability to decide how to do a task and requires the following:
 - Determine what actions are needed
 - Determine how long it will take
- Organization refers to:
 - The ability to put all the steps of a task in order
 - Refers to the ability to determine logical places to store items and information in order to find them later
- These skills are considered executive functions and require the frontal lobes of the brain

WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE?

- Frequently late or failure to complete assignments and tasks
- Inability to sequence items (i.e. arrange them in a particular order)
- Inability to gather required tools or information to complete a task or activity
- Inability to adapt to changes in routine
- May have difficulty planning ahead for activities, may be disorganized, and may not think ahead or anticipate consequences of actions or choices
- Difficulty starting or finishing things
- Difficulty with tasks that used to be easy, such as getting dressed or finishing a work assignment
- Stops participating in favourite activities
- Difficulty trying new ways of doing things
- Only capable of doing one thing at a time, unable to multi-task

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE CAUSES AND COMPLICATIONS?

Possible causes:

- Damage to the frontal lobe
- The following may make planning and organization worse:
 - Fatigue or sleep issues
 - Stress or illness
 - Too much information to organize or process
 - Trying to do too many things at one time
 - Distraction in the environment
 - Doing something new/unfamiliar that is not well organized or clear

Possible complications:

- Individuals may be unable to plan their day without support, making daily tasks difficult if they live alone
- Decreased independence
- Individuals may become confused and overwhelmed easily, particularly in busy environments

Disclaimer: This information is not meant to replace advice from a medical doctor. Consult a health care provider regarding specific medical concerns or treatment.

FACT SHEET CONTINUED.



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WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Minimize distractions and encourage the individual to:
 - Focus on one thing at a time
 - Put things away when finished with them
 - Have only the things they need in their work space
- Support the individual when following routines
- Provide daily schedules and daily task lists and refer to this often during the day
- Set specific times to focus on planning and organizing for the next day
- Set specific days for chores/outings (i.e. grocery days, cleaning days)
- Use timers as reminders
- Do tasks that require the most planning and organizing early in the morning or when well rested
- Avoid situations that are overstimulating (e.g. noisy crowds)
- Take breaks throughout the day
- Put all information in one book or electronic organizer (e.g. cellphone calendar)
 - Shopping lists or To-Do Lists
 - Daily, weekly, monthly calendars
 - Phone numbers
 - Goals

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