

# Cognitive Problems

## What is a cognitive problem?

After a concussion, you might notice changes in your *cognition*. Cognition refers to the mental processes that happen in our brains that allow us to think, concentrate, remember, process information, and make decisions, among other things.

Symptoms of cognitive problems may last longer and be more severe if a person has other pre-existing conditions such as:

- Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Learning disabilities
- Anxiety or mood disorders
- Sleep and/or fatigue problems
- Pain

### Some cognitive problems you could experience after a concussion might include:

- Finding it hard to concentrate
- Finding it hard to remember information
- Difficulty having conversations (e.g., finding words to express yourself, following a conversation)
- Being slow to process information (e.g. what you read or what people say to you)
- Feeling “foggy” or confused
- Finding it hard to plan, to start, or to complete tasks
- Changes in your judgment or decision-making abilities

**\*\*This is not a complete list. Cognitive problems can look different for every patient and there are many types of cognitive problems.**

## Helpful tips:

- **Keep track of your symptoms and your tolerance level for both cognitive and physical activity.**
- **If any activity causes the start of new or existing symptoms, reduce your effort for a short while.**
- **Take breaks often and gradually. Do the activity for a longer period of time.**
- **Keep track of changes in your mood and how you are feeling.**

**Tell your primary healthcare provider if your cognitive problems are not improving or if they last for more than 1 month. Your primary care provider can refer you for testing or to other specialists to find treatments and strategies to help you.**



## What can I do to treat cognitive problems?

Treatment for cognitive problems will be different depending on the symptoms you have. It might include early management strategies that you can learn to do on your own such as pacing or taking short breaks.

It might include working with rehabilitation specialists such as an Occupational Therapist (OT) or Speech Language Pathologist (SLP).

Treatments can help you learn ways to cope with your cognitive problems and work around them. They can also help reduce prolonged symptoms so that you can slowly return to your normal roles and activities at home, work, and school over time.

For prolonged cognitive symptoms your health care provider may consider using a drug called methylphenidate, which can help people improve their mental focus. This may be an option for people if their health care provider finds that other treatments are not working.

## Patient tips:

Being social is very important, but a concussion can make it hard to be with other people.

So one approach is to keep social visits really short. Maybe with just one person in a quiet place and use a timer!

Even 20 minutes of talking with someone else can have health benefits.

## Additional resources

Below is a list of resources you may find helpful to learn more about cognitive problems as well as tools that may help you with your recovery process.

### **Becoming a Self-Manager: Brain Breaks (webpage)**

<https://concussion.vch.ca/brain-breaks>

### **Caring for Yourself after a Concussion: Pacing and Planing (Video)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXQmnvlnXeA&list=PLvD7HhN5mi-ML63F7N0F6oj1yiilrUJmw&index=5>

### **Cognitive Function: Thinking Skills (webpage)**

<https://concussion.vch.ca/cognitive-function-thinking-skills>

### **Caring for Yourself After a Concussion: Mindfulness (webpage)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qnGDM2CE8Co&list=PLvD7HhN5mi-ML63F7N0F6oj1yiilrUJmw&index=6>