

## At-Home Activities to Improve Cognition

When recovering from a brain injury, most of the work happens outside of a doctor's office. Knowing how to practice skills at home can help accelerate yours or your loved one's progress. This article lists ideas for improving cognition, including memory, problem-solving, orientation, organization, and reasoning.

### Memory

*To help your loved one:*

- Ask them to remember regular things – like where you parked the car at the store, list of groceries needed, or upcoming birthdays.
- Cook together – remembering recipes and steps to cook is a great memory exercise.
- Watch TV and discuss it later by asking the person to recall certain details about the show.

*To help yourself:*

- Keep a memory log or a journal with you at all times and write important notes down daily. Your smartphone can work well for this.
- Play memory games with family or friends like Go Fish or play a “brain game” on your phone.
- Look at a picture and draw it from memory. Compare your drawing to the original picture.

### Orientation

*To help your loved one:*

- Read the paper together or watch daily news together to help reinforce orientation.
- While running errands in a familiar area, ask the individual questions like what else they can find in that area, how you'd make your way home (make a right, make a left go straight), etc.

*To help yourself:*

- Keep a calendar and a clock in a common area of the home and update it daily.
- Take short walks to and from familiar places regularly (if possible).
- Write down directions to places before looking at a map to test your orientation and memory.

## **Sequencing & Organization**

*To help your loved one:*

- Ask them to organize chores such as taking out the trash and to complete tasks within a certain time frame.
- Complete puzzles together.

*To help yourself:*

- Make a daily to-do list; even include small tasks like brushing your teeth.
- Plan weekday meals for yourself or your family.
- Set time limits to complete tasks.

## **Problem Solving**

*To help your loved one:*

- Ask for their input on important medical or financial decisions, if appropriate.
- Take a class together to learn a new skill.

*To help yourself:*

- Write pros and cons lists for issues you have and are unsure about.
- Become involved in community activities where you work or play in group settings.
- Play games like Sudoku.

## **Attention**

*To help your loved one:*

- Reassure them that attention issues are normal after a brain injury.
- Encourage them to develop strategies to increase attention and practice with them.

*To help yourself:*

- Focus on one task at a time; break larger tasks into smaller ones.
- Decrease distractions in your environment – e.g. loud noises. Gradually practice focusing in noisier environments.
- Get plenty of rest.

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