

COGNITION



Multiple Sclerosis (MS) can affect any part of the brain, it can cause problems not just with muscle control but also can affect thinking ability.

Often the signs are subtle and can include changes within abstract thinking, memory, attention, word finding or handling information. There may be problems with retrieving memories, reasoning or concentration. Those with minor problems may be aware of them but in severe cases the person may have no insight into the situation.

It is important to remember that at times we all forget where we put the keys, what was said at a meeting, the name of someone or what happened at the beginning of a film that you are watching. These situations are common to everyone and are not necessarily caused by MS.

Generally cognitive issues in MS affect the speed or ease with which someone can process information and does not indicate a loss of underlying intelligence.

Not everyone who has MS experiences cognitive problems. ¹

What is Cognition?

Cognition is the mind's ability to store, organise and retrieve information.

Cognition includes our ability to;

- Learn and remember new information
- Focus, maintain and divide attention
- Think, reason and solve problems
- Understand and use appropriate language
- Recognise objects or people, put information together and judge distances
- Plan, perform and control one's action

Factors that can adversely affect cognition

- Stressful situations
- Noisy or distracting environments
- fatigue

Benefits of recognising cognitive problems

Cognitive changes can have an impact in daily life. A range of strategies can help you to stay organised and focused.

General tips to stay organized and focused.

- Be patient.
- Remain calm when your memory fails you. It's normal to be frustrated when you forget something. Taking time to calm down can clear your memory.
- Recognise that it's normal to forget something that happened 15 minutes ago even though you can clearly recall something that happened a long time ago.
- Be focused and pay attention. Often we forget things because we never really paid attention in the first place.
- Take notes if you think you may have trouble recalling information or notes of where you have left items.
- Use your phone to remind you of appointments and important events.
- Use electronic to do lists.
- Use electronic navigators if you have trouble planning how to get somewhere.
- Plan challenging intellectual tasks for your best time of the day. Don't do them in the morning if you are a night owl.
- Habits and routines can eliminate many problems eg always hang your car keys on the hook by the door as soon as you walk in the door.
- Avoid multi tasking and concentrate on completing one task at a time.
- Minimize distractions eg don't watch TV while someone is telling you something that is important.
- Use a notebook and/or sticky notes to record where you are up to if you are unable to complete a task.
- Try again at a later date if you are unable to solve a problem, such as adapting a recipe's quantities or how to balance the budget.
- Ask for help from family, friends and colleagues and the Society's therapists.
- Read books and articles on websites for suggestions on improving memory and organisation.
- When learning something new, give yourself extra time to learn and recall the information.

If you would like individual strategies for memory, attention and concentration, information processing and problem solving please ask the MS Society for specific tips to assist in these areas.

If you are interested in finding out more information

MS Society of Australia

www.msaustralia.org.au/msinformation/cognitive

About MS- How MS can affect you- Cognitive Problems.

MS Society of Queensland

<http://www.msqld.org/how-we-help/information/cognitive-changes-book>

Understanding & Managing Cognitive, Emotional & Behavioral Changes in Multiple Sclerosis-. By Christine Leech.

MS Society of UK

http://www.mssociety.org.uk/support_and_services/free_publications/ms_essentials_02.html

Memory & Thinking: MS Essentials 2.

National MS Society of USA

www.nationalmssociety.org/spotlight-cognition.asp

Mind & Emotions.

Multiple Sclerosis Trust

www.mstrust.org.uk/information/a2z/cognition.jsp

References:

1. Rehabilitation in Multiple Sclerosis 2002, MS Essentials for People Living with MS- Memory and Thinking, Multiple Sclerosis Society, London

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