



Managing Memory Problems for Employment After Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Memory problems after TBI are common. People with TBI may forget names or instructions, miss a scheduled event, or misplace things.

Types of Memory and the Challenges Experienced in the Workplace After a TBI

Recent memory affects a person's ability to hold onto the new information they need to complete a task at work. For example, people may

- Forget instructions or details about a meeting. Lose track of a phone message.
- Forget directions from a supervisor.
- Forget log-in information for work devices.

Prospective memory affects the ability to remember to carry out a planned task or intention at work. For example, people may

- Have a tough time remembering planned tasks like meetings or deadlines.
- Misplace tools or documents.
- Forget to send important emails or miss meetings with clients.

Procedural memory affects the ability to perform a task or certain sequence of movements learned over time at work. TBI does not always affect this type of memory. Examples include:

- Trouble performing routine tasks like operating equipment or typing after TBI.
- Forget how to use the time clock system.
- Difficulty entering data with standard templates.



Tips for Managing Problems With Memory at Work

- » **Use both digital and physical organization tools.** Use digital calendars, task apps, notebooks, journals, and alarms.
- » **Use physical memory aids.** Create a memory station at work. It could include checklists, labeled folders, or color-coded bins.
- » **Structure the work environment so that it cues your memory.** Keep a list of tasks to be completed in plain sight and always in the same location. Keep work tools in the same place every time.
- » **Manage tasks and practice them.** Break tasks into smaller steps. Rehearse key job routines. Be careful, consistent, and organized with tasks and strategies.
- » **Try prioritization techniques**, like using colors or highlights to identify your most important tasks and stay focused throughout the workday.
- » **Adjust your environment at work.** Reduce distractions. You can use noise-canceling headphones. Make your workspace a quiet space.
- » **Use communication supports.** Ask for written instructions when receiving tasks. Repeat the instructions to aid comprehension and retention.



Coping Strategies Outside of Work

Small daily habits can help support your memory outside of work. These may include:

- » Getting enough sleep, exercise, and taking frequent breaks to improve memory and attention span.
- » Staying hydrated and eating a healthy diet.
- » Keeping a consistent daily routine outside of work.
- » Seeking support from trusted family, friends, support groups, or other TBI survivors.

Tips for Managing Problems With Memory While Looking for a Job

Problems with memory after TBI may affect your search for a job. Try these tips to reduce challenges when looking for a job:

- » **Use one system** to track job applications, interviews, and follow-ups. This could be a notebook or an app on your phone.
- » **Ask for information in writing** (e.g., at job fairs, get physical copies during interviews) when you can. This could include email confirmations or written instructions.

Real Life Experience

Paula is a college professor whose memory was impacted after a TBI. She found tools and strategies to help her return to work. Paula says, “I can’t rely on my memory the way I used to. Every morning, I write down, here’s what the plan is for today.”



Special Note: You may need support or accommodations from your employer for some of the strategies in this resource. It is up to you whether you want to disclose that you have had a TBI. You can decide which ideas in this resource feel right for you based on your own comfort level and your workplace situation.

Source: The content of this tipsheet was adapted from *Memory and Traumatic Brain Injury*, developed by Tessa Hart, PhD, and Angelle Sander, PhD. It was revised in 2025 by Therese M. O’Neil-Pirozzi, ScD; Angelle Sander, PhD; and Robin Hanks, PhD, in collaboration with the Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center (<https://msktc.org/>).

Disclaimer: The contents of the resource were developed under a grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR grant number 90DPKT0021). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of this resource do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, or HHS, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

Copyright © 2026 American Institutes for Research. May be reproduced and distributed freely with appropriate attribution. Prior permission must be obtained for inclusion in fee-based materials.

