

Perseveration after an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)

What is perseveration?

- Perseveration is when you repeat an action, a word, or a movement. It can also be a feeling or an idea that does not go away. Some examples of perseveration are:
 - › Getting “stuck” (not being able to stop) brushing your teeth
 - › Talking about the same thing over and over
- **It is important to know that you are not doing this on purpose.** You may not be aware you are doing it. You may feel like you cannot stop or change your behaviour, even if it is troubling you in some way.
- If you feel stressed, worried, or sad, it can be harder to change from 1 task to another or to stop feeling a certain way.
- Often, perseveration can affect your activities and relationships. People with perseveration after an ABI may seem:
 - › Stubborn
 - › Attention-seeking
 - › Fixed on an idea or a topic
 - › Repetitive, like their actions, thoughts, and feelings are “stuck in a loop”

What can I do to help with perseveration?

- It can be hard to stop an action, a thought, or a feeling because stopping means doing something different. This can be harder than it seems because it includes:
 - › Being aware of the action
 - › Having a sense of the amount of time spent on the action
 - › Knowing that the action needs to stop
 - › Stopping the action
 - › Thinking of what to do next
 - › Starting a new action
- If you have problems with any of these steps, it can cause perseveration. You may need cues or people to interrupt the perseveration and help you move on.

The following may help:

- **Prevention:** Try to avoid topics or activities that may lead to perseveration.
- **Redirection:** For example: a support person can change the subject, start a new activity, or help you move to a different place.

- **Physical cue:** A gentle, hands-on cue may work to stop the action.
 - › For example, if you get “stuck” while brushing your teeth, someone can hand you a towel to help you move on to the next step.
- Using a physical cue with redirection can guide you to the next activity or conversation topic.
 - › For example, someone can put their hand on your arm when they change topics.
- **Written checklist:** This can help with your daily routines. For example, a checklist on the bathroom mirror that lists the steps of brushing your teeth can help if you get “stuck” on one step.
- **Timers and alarms:** These can remind you to stop what you are doing and move on to the next step. You can set reminders on your phone or tablet to help you stay on track.
- **Reassurance as prevention:** Feeling anxious about something can lead to perseveration on that topic. It may help to identify the anxiety, be reassured, and then move on.
 - › Be careful: Focusing on the topic that is causing anxiety may raise your anxiety and the perseveration that goes with it.
- **Setting limits:** It may help to let your support person end the activity or change the conversation at an agreed time.
 - › For example: “We can talk about _____ for 5 minutes and then we need to move on.”
- **Ignoring:** Use this method carefully. Ignoring the behaviour may make the problem worse, but it may work when used with reassurance and redirection.

Resources

Brain Injury Association of Nova Scotia

- › www.braininjuryns.com
- › Phone (toll-free): 1-833-452-7246

Brain Injury Canada

- › www.braininjurycanada.ca

211 Nova Scotia: This free helpline can connect you to community and social services in your area. Service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in more than 240 languages.

- › <https://ns.211.ca>
- › Phone: 211

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