

Problems with “Getting Started” with Tasks after Brain Injury

The ability to effectively begin and complete tasks is often affected following a brain injury. What happens in your brain while starting and completing tasks involves many complex processes. They include memory, decision-making, motivation, insight, and other skills. If any of these abilities are reduced, the ability to initiate and complete tasks may also be impaired.

Task Initiation

Task initiation is the ability to start an activity. It involves developing the goal of the task, planning, and taking the steps to begin the task.

Task Completion/Follow Through

Task completion is the ability to complete a task fully. It involves remembering the goal and plan of the task, remembering the steps of the task, and verifying the goal of the task was met to ensure it was completed. It also includes the ability to reflect throughout the task and adjust actions and behaviors as needed.

Why do individuals with brain injuries struggle with task initiation/ completion?

It is important to understand that lack of task initiation or follow-through is not a sign of “laziness”, “defiance” or “lack of motivation”. It is a direct result of a brain injury; usually from damage to the frontal lobe of the brain that is responsible for many complex thoughts and actions. A person with a brain injury may have trouble going grocery shopping or preparing a meal. They may struggle with certain aspects of a task (e.g. remembering what is on the grocery list or thinking through how to cut up a vegetable) or have difficulties in all parts of the task (e.g. starting and finishing all steps involved in grocery shopping and meal preparation).

Strategies for helping task initiation and completion:

The environment plays a crucial role in the ability to initiate and follow through with a task. The person is more likely to be successful with that task by limiting distractions in the environment. (e.g. turning the music/TV off, stepping away so the person can focus, or removing clutter).

Other strategies that have been found helpful include:

Self-talk - Talking out the steps of the task while completing them helps with remembering and organizing each step.

Reading the steps - Having the steps of a task written out for the person to look at is helpful.

Checklists - Checking off when each step is complete helps the person know where they are in the task and encourages them to complete it to the end.

Be patient - Providing the person with the extra time to complete a task will help them not feel rushed and increase their independence.

Timers -Setting timers on the phone may help with reminding them when to start a task, and also help with managing when a task should be finished.

Creating routines - Establishing a routine for each day will help increase the likelihood of each task being completed. A calendar with daily to-do lists will help the person know when to start a new task.

Adjusting to life after a brain injury can be challenging. At the Brain Injury Association of Virginia, our trained experts are available to speak with you about your experience, answer your questions, and connect you with the best resources to meet your needs. Our services are free and confidential.

**To get in touch:
Call 1-800-444-6443
Visit biav.net**

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