

Key messages

There are different types/levels to attention:

- Sustained attention – commonly known as concentration. The ability to focus on one task for a sustained period of time.
- Selective attention – the ability to choose what you want to focus your attention on and ignore other stimuli.
- Alternation attention – the ability to alternate your attention from one stimulus to another with ease and speed.
- Divided attention – commonly known as multi-tasking. The ability to divide attention between two more stimuli.

Ways to support someone with attention difficulties:

- Educate and explain - help the person and their families/carers to understand that attentional difficulties can be an effect of the stroke.
- Remove distractions - find a quiet environment with no or little distractions.
- Give time - be patient, it might take longer for someone to move their attention between tasks.
- Repeat the information if someone has lost focus.
- Ask the person if they were able to take in what you said.
- Minimise instructions - think of how long a person can maintain their concentration for and try and keep any information given within that time frame.
- Help a person to break a task down into simple steps that they can do one at a time.
- Encourage a person to take breaks if they are losing concentration
- Use technology such as recording a TV programme to allow a person to rewind back if they have lost focus or become distracted.
- Slowly increase the time that someone focuses on one task such as reading, playing a game of cards or a computer game.
- Slowly start to introduce some distraction such as playing a radio when a person is reading or having a conversation.
- Refer to an Occupational Therapist or Neuropsychologist for a cognitive assessment and for cognitive rehabilitation.