

Living with changes in your

Planning and organising skills



IN THIS BOOKLET:

- How we plan and organise
- How a brain injury affects planning and organising
- What you can do
- Tools and tips
- Planning worksheets

Brain Injury Series

This booklet was written for, and with, people with an Acquired Brain Injury. An Acquired Brain Injury is an injury to someone's brain that happens during their lifetime. It can be caused by a stroke, an infection, lack of oxygen, surgery or a head injury, for example.

Note: throughout this booklet, we use the phrase 'brain injury' to refer to an Acquired Brain Injury.

Headway's Information and Support Team would be happy to hear your feedback on this booklet. Please contact us on 1800 400 478 or email info@headway.ie.

Visit www.headway.ie/information:

- To read or download copies of other booklets in this Brain Injury Series.
- To print the booklets and other resources, including Large Print versions.
- To request hard copies of the booklets.
- To see the booklet contributors and the sources we used.

Please note: we have done our best to provide information that is correct and up-to-date. However, we cannot be responsible for any errors or omissions. Everyone's brain injury affects them differently. You should not consider the information in this booklet as a substitute for getting advice from a doctor or other professional.

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Key points about planning and organising



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People with brain injuries share
their experiences

Introduction



Planning and organising are the skills we use to think about tasks and carry them out effectively. We plan and organise in order to achieve a goal.

We use planning and organising skills every day to get things done. We also use these skills to organise bigger events such as holidays.

In this booklet, we explain the brain's role in how we plan and organise and how a brain injury can affect these skills. We also suggest some tips and tools which you may find useful.

There are three worksheets on pages 13-18 of this booklet for you to use: **a Day planner**, **a Task planner** and **an Appointment planner**.

The tips and tools in this booklet are based on research and people's own experiences. Because everyone's brain injury affects them slightly differently, some of the suggestions will work for you – others won't. Try them out and use the ones you find helpful.

“Since my brain injury, it takes me ages to organise myself to leave the house in the morning. I get annoyed at myself for being so slow.”

Simon from Tipperary

How we plan and organise

We usually take the steps below when we have something we want to achieve - a goal. We carry out a task, or a number of tasks, in order to achieve this goal.

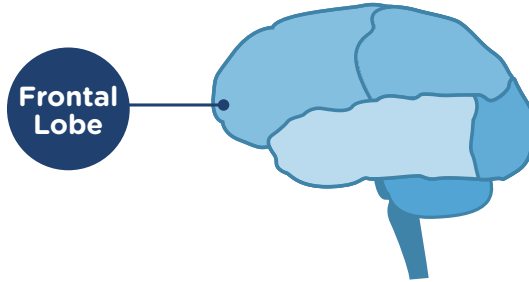
- 1 **Planning** - deciding what we need to do in order to achieve the goal.
- 2 **Initiating** - getting started on the task.
- 3 **Sequencing** - doing things in the right order.
- 4 **Finishing the task** - achieving the goal.

Task example: Cooking a meal



How a brain injury affects planning and organising skills

The Frontal Lobes



The Frontal Lobes of the brain play an important role in our ability to plan and organise. We have two frontal lobes, one left and one right.

The Frontal Lobes act like ‘managers’ to other parts of the brain. They are very important in helping us to get things done. The Frontal Lobes also allow us to change what we are doing when we notice something is not going according to plan. So, an injury to this area of the brain, often affects our ability to plan and organise.

We also use a number of other thinking skills when completing tasks, as well as the specific planning and organising skills mentioned above. For example, if your brain injury has affected your attention or memory, this can also impact on your ability to get tasks done. Also, tiredness or stress can make any difficulties worse.




For further information on **Attention** and **Memory**, see the relevant booklets.

Common difficulties with planning and organising

After a brain injury, many people experience problems with:

- Planning meals, shopping and cooking.
- Planning their day and getting tasks done.
- Keeping things organised at work or at home
- for example: dealing with emails, bills and other documents.
- Bigger tasks - for example: planning a holiday or doing DIY projects at home.

Everyone's brain injury affects their planning and organising skills slightly differently. You might find you can still get some tasks done easily, but find others are harder than before. Also tiredness or stress can make any difficulties worse.

 If you would like to find out more about your particular planning and organising difficulties, a Psychologist or Occupational Therapist can advise you. They can assess a range of your thinking skills and suggest specific approaches that may help. See [Help and information](#) on page 19 for contact details.



Try to keep your home or workplace tidy. This will help prevent you getting distracted by clutter. A tidy environment can also reduce the frustration of frequently having to look for things.



What you can do

- Read the **General advice** below.
- Follow the **Steps for planning a task** on page 6.
- Use the **Tools** on pages 9-11.
- Photocopy the planning worksheets on pages 13-18 and try them out.

General advice

- Follow a routine. Try to have a regular time each day when you make plans for the next day. Use the **Day planner** on page 13, if you wish.
- When you are planning your day, try to be realistic about how many tasks you can get done. You may need more time for each task than you did before your injury.
- Do important tasks when you are at your freshest.
- Take regular breaks.
- Try to finish one task before starting another one.



If a task is taking too long or it is not going well, ask yourself:

- **Do you need to take a break?**
- **Do you have all the equipment and information you need?**
- **Can you change the way you are doing the task?**
- **Do you need to ask for help or advice?**

Steps for planning a task

1. Photocopy or print the **Task planner** on page 15-16 if you wish.
2. Think about the task and write down:
 - What goal you want to achieve.
 - What you need to do.
 - Things you need, such as equipment or information.
3. Break down the task into steps. If you are not sure what the steps are, ask for advice or do a search on the internet.
4. Write the steps down.
5. Tick off each step as you complete it.
6. If a task is taking too long or is not going well, stop and ask yourself why. See page 5 for some helpful questions.
7. After you finish the task, ask yourself:
 - Did I achieve my goal?
 - What went well or not so well?
 - What will I do differently next time?



See page 7 for an example of a task showing the above steps.



Example task

Goal: What do I want to achieve?

Get boiler serviced.

Plan: How am I going to complete the task?

Do:

Steps I need to take:



1 *Find last year's invoice in the drawer.*



2 *Write down model and make of boiler.*



3 *Call engineer to arrange.*



4 *Check cost.*



5 *Check diary and agree a date.*



6 *Write date on wall calendar.*



Things I need such as equipment or information:

1 *Engineer's phone number.*



2 *Make and model of boiler.*



3 *My diary.*



4 *Last year's invoice.*



Review: Did I achieve my goal?

Yes ☒ No ☐

What problems did I have with the task?

Hard to find last year's invoice.

How did I overcome any problems?

Emptied out the whole drawer. Went through things carefully. Threw away things I didn't need.

What things went well with the task?

Remembered to check cost compared to last year so I knew it had not gone up.

What things did not go so well?

Forgot to check the wall calendar so I had to cancel another appointment that was clashing.

What will I do differently next time?

*Check each suggested date in my diary calendar.
Put all invoices into a folder for next year.*



Tools that can help



Mark the ones you find useful



An organiser

You can get a **My organiser** booklet from Headway. It contains Contacts and Personal Details sections, a Diary, and the Planning worksheets from this booklet. Phone Headway on 1800 400 478 to get one.



Diary and calendar

- Put appointments and events in to your diary or phone. Note the **date** and **time**, **who** you are meeting and **where**.
- Get in to the habit of **checking** every morning to see what you have planned that day.
- Use a **wall calendar**, as well as a diary or phone, to keep track of your appointments. The calendar will also be helpful to other people who need to know what you have planned.



Set up a convenient place as your Home information centre. If you keep your wall calendar, notebooks, to-do lists and phone, all in the one place, you won't have to go looking for them when you need them.

☒ **Mark the ones you find useful**

☐ **Electronic devices**

- All smart phones and computers have electronic calendars. You can use the electronic calendar to set **reminders** for appointments and events.
- Use **apps** for making lists or checklists. New apps are being developed all the time. Do an internet search for ‘Task planning apps’.
- Services such as iCloud or OneDrive, store copies of your phone’s contacts and other information. So if you lose your phone, or get a new one, you can still access this stored information.

☐ **Organising your paper documents**

- Get a **ring binder folder**, a hole puncher and some subject dividers.
- Use the **subject dividers** for each section you want in the folder – for example: ‘Medical Reports’, ‘Appointment Letters’ or ‘Bank Statements’.
- Put your documents in to the relevant section of the folder.
- When the folder starts getting too full, move older documents into a file box or dispose of those you do not need.

☐ Managing bills

- Set up your household bills for automatic payment by Direct Debit.
- If you are not paying by Direct Debit, pay the bill on the day you receive it, or put a reminder in your phone or diary when to pay it.
- When a bill has been paid, write the date it was paid, on it. Then put the bill away in a folder.

☐ Lists

- To-do Lists: Write down a list of things you need to do each day. Put the most important things first. Tick the items off as you finish them.
- Shopping Lists: Keep a notepad for shopping lists handy. Then you can add items to the list as soon as you think of them.
- Checklists: Make a list of the steps needed to complete a task. Then, tick off each step as you do them. For example:

Checklist for leaving the house



Close any open windows.



Lock back door.



Get phone, keys and bag.



Set house alarm.



Lock front door.





Summary of key points

- Planning and organising are the skills we use to think about tasks and carry them out effectively. We plan and organise in order to achieve a goal.
- A brain injury can affect these skills, particularly if the injury is to the Frontal Lobes of the brain.
- Using tools like a diary, reminders in your phone, checklists and planners, can help.
- Follow a routine. Try to have a regular time each day when you make plans for the next day.
- Do important tasks when you are at your freshest and take regular breaks.
- Try to finish one task before starting another.
- If a task is not going well, stop and ask yourself if you can change how you are doing it.



If you have difficulty with applying for social welfare entitlements, grants or public services, contact your local Citizens Information Centre for advice and assistance with forms. Lo-call t: 076 107 4000.

You can also request assistance from the Access Officer in any public organisations you are applying to. See [Help and information](#) on page 19 for more details.



Day planner

Date:

Important things to do today:



1

☐

2

☐

3

☐

Other things to do today:



1

☐

2

☐

3

☐

4

☐

Time

Planned activity:



8 am

☐

9 am

☐

10 am

☐

11 am

☐

12 pm

☐

1 pm

☐



Photocopy this page or print extra copies
from www.headway.ie/information

Time	Planned activity:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2 pm		<input type="checkbox"/>
3 pm		<input type="checkbox"/>
4 pm		<input type="checkbox"/>
5 pm		<input type="checkbox"/>
6 pm		<input type="checkbox"/>
7 pm		<input type="checkbox"/>
8 pm		<input type="checkbox"/>

What went well today?

What could have gone better?

Next time, I will:



Task planner



Photocopy this page or print extra copies
from www.headway.ie/information

Goal: What do I want to achieve?

Plan: How am I going to complete the task?

Do:

Steps I need to take:



1

☐

2

☐

3

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4

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5

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6

☐

Things I need such as equipment
or information:



1

☐

2

☐

3

☐

4

☐

Review: Did I achieve my goal?

Yes ☐

No ☐

What problems did I have with the task?

How did I overcome any problems?

What things went well with the task?

What things did not go so well?

What will I do differently next time?



Appointment planner

The boxes with blue labels are for you to record things now for your next appointment. The boxes with black labels are to write in when you are at the appointment.

Appointment date:	
Appointment time:	
To see:	
Where:	

Things I have noted since the last appointment:	
Item	
1	
2	
3	
What was said about them at today's appointment:	
Item	
1	
2	
3	



**Photocopy this page or print extra copies
from www.headway.ie/information**

Questions I want to ask at this appointment:

1

2

3

Answers to my questions given today:

1

2

3

Changes made today to treatment or programme:

Further appointment given today? Yes ☐ No ☐

Date:

Added to my diary and calendar? ☐

Added to the next Appointment planner? ☐

Help and information

Visit **www.headway.ie/information** for further information and to print out the planning worksheets.

Access Officers

Ask for assistance from the Access Officers in Government Departments, the HSE, the Dept of Social Protection or your local Council, for example. The Access Officers' job is to assist people with disabilities.

Psychologists

Headway offers free community-based brain injury assessment, counselling and rehabilitation in Cork, Dublin, Kerry and Limerick.

t: 1800 400 478 or visit **www.headway.ie**

To access a public Psychologist, your GP can refer you.

HSE t: 1850 24 1850 or visit **www.hse.ie**

To find a registered private Psychologist, contact the **Psychological Society of Ireland**.

t: 01 472 0105 or visit **www.psychologicalsociety.ie**

Occupational Therapists

To access a public Occupational Therapist, contact your local HSE Health Office.

HSE t: 1850 24 1850 or visit **www.hse.ie**

To find a private Occupational Therapist, contact the **Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland**.

t: 01 874 8136 or visit **www.aoti.ie**

About Headway

HEADWAY
Brain Injury Services & Support

Founded in 1985, Headway is a charity that offers community-based brain injury rehabilitation services in Dublin, Cork, Kerry, Limerick and the South East. We also have a country-wide information and support service:

t: 1800 400 478 and web: www.headway.ie

Headway is accredited by CARF International for Adult Home, Community and Vocational Brain Injury Services. www.carf.org



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To support Headway Ireland's work, please phone 1800 400 478 or visit www.headway.ie.

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