

You and Your Brain

Understanding Cognition

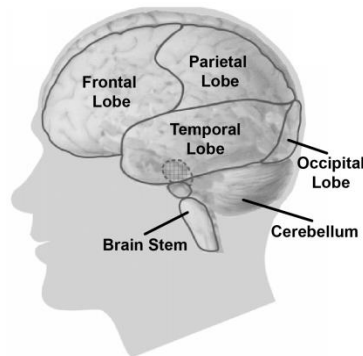
What is Cognition?

Cognition (say *kog-ni-shun*) is a set of brain thinking skills that you need to plan and carry out the things you do every day. It is part of your ability to pay attention, understand information, learn new skills, remember things, and problem solve.

Where does thinking or cognition happen?

Cognitive (say *kog-nuh-tive*) skills happen in your brain. The brain understands your senses (sight, sound, touch, smell, taste), controls movement, and controls behaviour.

The brain is made up of sections, or lobes, that are responsible for different things.



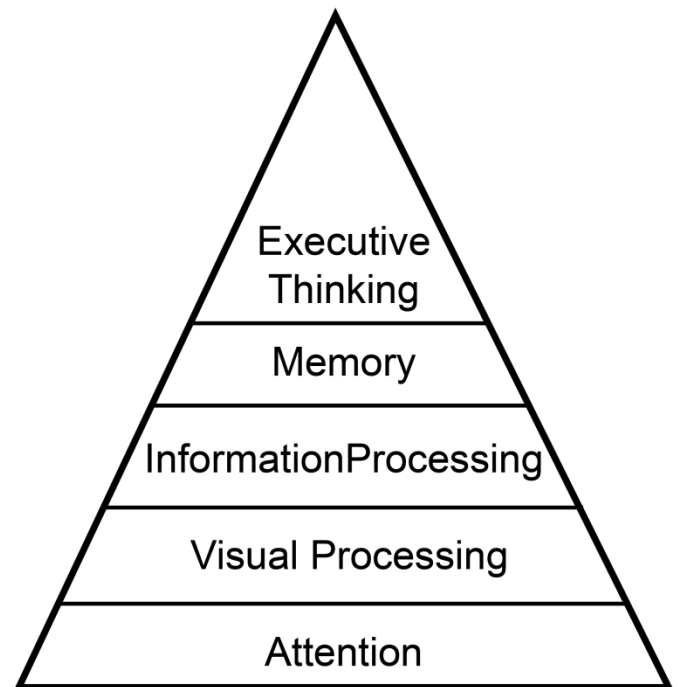
Why is cognition important?

Cognitive skills are necessary to do every day activities such as taking your medications, doing activities in your home and community, doing your work activities, and taking care of your own health.

What does cognition include?

Important thinking skills include:

- paying attention and concentrating
- taking in and understanding information you read, hear, or see
- remembering or memory
- executive thinking - involves planning, organizing, problem solving, reasoning and judgement



Thinking skills higher up in the pyramid rely on skills lower down on the pyramid.

What can affect your cognition?

Your thinking can be influenced by:

- poor nutrition or hydration
- not enough sleep
- pain
- infection
- taking many different types of medication
- taking drugs and/or alcohol
- dementia
- delirium
- mental health conditions (such as depression, anxiety)
- diseases of the brain
- chronic neurological disorders (such as Parkinson’s disease, multiple sclerosis)
- acquired brain injury (from a stroke or head injury)
- not enough oxygen or blood flow to the brain (from cardiac arrest, stroke)

What can you do to support a healthy brain?

Here are a few things you can do to help keep your brain healthy:

- Sleep and rest.
- Drink water (unless you have been told differently because of a medical condition).
- Eat healthy.
- Do different physical activities, as advised by your doctor.
- Try not to do too many activities in one day.
- If you are feeling anxious or depressed, speak to your doctor and healthcare team.
- Avoid drinking alcohol or using recreational drugs (they can make your symptoms worse).

Here are some websites where you can get more information specific to your condition:

Alzheimer’s Society of BC	alzheimer.ca/en/bc
Brain Streams	brainstreams.ca
Heart and Stroke Foundation	heartandstroke.ca
Canadian Mental Health Association	cmha.bc.ca
Parkinson Society British Columbia	parkinson.bc.ca
Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada	mssociety.ca
Fraser Health: Concussion	fraserhealth.ca/health-info/health-topics/concussion
Fraser Valley Brain Injury Association	fvbia.org

If you have concerns or would like to learn more about cognition, speak to your doctor or occupational therapist.