

## Welcome to today's Webinar

Your Presenter is: Mali Levav  
Your Facilitator is: Chris Porter

## Acknowledgement

We acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional custodians past and present on whose lands we meet today.

We acknowledge the deep feelings of attachment and the relationship of Aboriginal people to country and respect the cultural authority of the elders in each community

## Introduction to Presenter

Occupational Therapist working as an MS Consultant at the **MS Employment Support Service (ESS)** assisting people affected by MS to manage their symptoms and maintain their employment or find a suitable job.

The service is currently available in some areas of VIC & NSW.

The team of MS ESS consists of experienced Occupational Therapists & Physiotherapists who understand MS.

If you want further details about our service, call us on 1800 042 138 or email [ess.admin@ms.org.au](mailto:ess.admin@ms.org.au).

## Managing Cognition in the Workplace



## What is Cognition?

Group of mental processes such as

- **Information processing speed**
- Visual perception
- Language
- Calculation
- **Memory**
- **Executive Functions**

## Cognitive changes in MS

- Common
- Mild
- Fluctuate
- Variable

## What's causing the changes?



- Changes in the brain
- Fatigue / lack of sleep
- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Medications



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## Managing cognitive changes



Can we do something about it?

**ABSOLUTELY!!!**



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## Poll No. 2



What type of job are you doing?

- White-collar workers: professional / managerial / admin
- Blue-collar: manual work
- Grey-collar (both white & blue) - skilled workers that complete some manual labor (technicians, nurses)
- Pink-collar: retail, sales, customer service role

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## Likely cognitive weaknesses in MS



- Information processing speed
- Complex Attention
- Episodic Memory & Learning
- Executive Functions



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## Cognitive strengths in MS



- Simple Attention & Short-Term Memory
- Procedural memory
- Language
- General knowledge



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## Information Processing Speed



- The time it takes a person to do a mental task
- Slowed processing speed is very common

### Potential challenges at work:

- Difficulty with keeping up with information presented (e.g., conversations, meetings, instructions)
- Need more time to complete complex tasks / learn new tasks

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## Information Processing Speed



### Potential solutions:

- Ask colleagues / supervisor to slow down
- Repeat back information
- As possible - be prepared for meetings (agenda)
- Give yourself more time to complete complex or new tasks to ensure accuracy
- Postpone/delegate not-urgent tasks
- If disclosed - talk to your supervisor about the two last strategies to take the pressure off



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## Complex Attention



- Sustained attention
- Divided attention ('multitasking')
- Working memory



### Potential challenges at work:

- Difficulty to concentrate for prolonged time (e.g., reading a long doc / attending a long meeting)
- Difficulty doing two simultaneous tasks (e.g., taking minutes during meetings)
- Struggle to work in open plan office / easily distracted

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## Complex Attention



### Potential solutions:

- Complete higher level attention tasks when fresh
- Alternate between tasks
- Take short regular rest break every 30-45min
- Break a long task to smaller components
- Prioritise and do one task at a time
- Noise cancelling headphones / with music
- Book a private room & ask not to be interrupted
- Devices such as the Livescribe Smartpen

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## Complex Attention



### Livescribe Echo Smartpen



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## Memory & New Learning



Attention; Processing; Recall



### Potential challenges at work:

- Difficulty remembering names of colleagues
- Difficulty recalling information read, said, etc.
- Word finding difficulty in conversations / meetings / emails / report writing
- Need more time to learn complex/new tasks

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## Memory & New Learning



### Potential solutions:

- Pay attention! Catch yourself when your mind wanders and bring it back to 'here and now'
- Know your learning style & do something active:  
**Visual** - write notes, highlight key words, use manuals/guides, ask people to send you emails  
**Auditory** - repeat and verify, record notes using digital voice recorder  
**Kinaesthetic** - ask people to show you & do the task yourself, ask for feedback

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## Memory & New Learning



### Potential solutions:

- Build associations
- In conversations - relax and use a different word
- When writing documents/reports -
  - Dictionary
  - Templates
  - Prepare most common list of words
  - Copy/Paste and then adjust

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## Executive Functions



Mental skills that help the brain organise and act on information -

- Planning & Prioritising
- Organisation
- Initiation
- Flexibility / Shifting
- Problem Solving
- Self monitoring
- Emotional & behavior control



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## Executive Functions



### Potential challenges at work:

- Dive into duties without prioritising and planning
- Not sure where to start so procrastinate
- Misplace items
- Say / do the first thing that come to mind
- Rush & not check tasks before submission
- Struggle with quick decision making
- Difficulty with dealing with changes at work

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## Executive Functions



### Potential solutions:

- Start the task only after you understand expectations
- Give yourself time to plan, prioritise & organise
- Make checklists / to-do lists & tick off tasks done
- Set time limits
- Use planners / calendars (paper or digital) to document meetings/tasks



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## Executive Functions



### Potential solutions:

- Give yourself time to weigh up different options
- Check your work before submitting it
- Take rest breaks from mentally fatiguing tasks
- Ask questions, assistance or advice from your colleague / supervisor



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## Managing factors affecting cognition



### Fatigue Management & Energy Conservation:

#### **Task**

- Complete harder tasks when fresh
- Break tasks to smaller components & pace yourself
- Use tools/equipment as appropriate



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## Managing factors affecting cognition



### Fatigue Management & Energy Conservation:

#### Environment

- Move desks closer to printer/toilet/kitchen
- Ergonomic workstation
- Keep cool



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## Managing factors affecting cognition



### Fatigue Management & Energy Conservation:

#### Person

- Prioritise & plan your day / route
- Pace yourself
- Take short regular breaks
- Sit to complete tasks when possible but change postures
- Delegate tasks as possible
- Allow enough rest & sleep before and after work
- Eat healthily & keep hydrated
- Exercise

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## Managing factors affecting cognition



### Stress & Mood

- Relaxation
- Meditation
- Yoga
- Exercise
- Fun & social activities
- Counselling



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## Cognitive Reserve & Neuroplasticity



### Find the right & fun challenge that suits YOU

- Learn something new
- Take a course
- Read
- Play games
- Exercise
- Online Brain Training, for example:
  - Brain HQ
  - CogniFit
  - Lumosity



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## Cognitive Reserve & Neuroplasticity



### Brain HQ



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## Questions



MS Connect  
1800 042 138  
[msconnect@ms.org.au](mailto:msconnect@ms.org.au)

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## The National Disability Insurance Scheme



### A major change to the way disability supports and services are funded and delivered

- Available to people who are: under 65, satisfy residency requirements and are able to demonstrate that their disability substantially affects daily living
- Promoting choice, control and social and economic participation
- Providing a whole-of-life approach
- It is not means tested
- Providing reasonable and necessary supports and services
- Ensuring equity of access

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## We can help you to



- understand the eligibility requirements
- understand the pathways to access the NDIS
- prepare for a planning conversation
- understand your current supports and any unmet need
- develop your goals

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## We are a 'Registered Provider'



### Once you have an NDIS approved plan MS is registered with National Disability Insurance Agency to deliver:

- Support Coordination – assistance to help make your plan active
- Residential Respite
- Social Support Day Program (Vic)
- Exercise physiology and personal training (NSW)
- Specialist Continence Assessment (NSW)
- Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy (NSW and Vic)
- Want to learn more - please call MS Connect

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## Thank you



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