

Do you repeat yourself or get stuck like a broken record... ?

What is perseveration?

Perseveration is getting stuck on something. It may be an activity, word, phrase, question or movement, such as tapping, wiping, or picking that is repeated again and again even when it is not appropriate for the situation at hand. Think of children on a long journey who ask every five minutes 'Are we there yet?' Perseverating is sounding or acting 'like a broken record'.

How do I know if I have perseveration?

- You keep asking the same question over and over again even when given an answer.
- Keep saying the same phrase or word.
- Repeating the same behaviour such as tapping the foot or scratching.
- Getting stuck on one idea and not being able to shift to a different idea.
- Bringing up a topic that has already been talked about over and over again.
- Unable to change your train of thought.
- Keep eating even though you may not be hungry.
- Appear to act in a very stubborn way.

'George's' Story

Since his diagnosis 'George' talks about his tumour and other favourite topics all the time. He seems to get 'stuck' on these topics and nothing can stop him once he starts. When someone else is talking, he does not really listen because he wants to get back to telling his story. He talks over and over about the tumour, retelling his experiences to as many people as he can. It does not matter if they have heard the story many times before. Other people find this boring but it is hard to get him to talk about other topics. His family members can be quite rude to him. They tell him to be quiet or just walk away when he starts on one of his stories. He finds this upsetting but it still does not stop his perseveration.

Strategies

For the person with a brain tumour

- Try to use lists and tick off the activities or tasks as you go.
- Set time limits for tasks to keep you on track.
- Write out tasks in steps so you don't spend too long on one task or thought.
- Try to let other people have their say when you are talking with them.

KEY FACTS

Carers of people with a brain tumour who were surveyed said that 28% of their relatives frequently repeated certain actions or got stuck on ideas.

For the Carer/family member

- Try gentle distraction to shift focus away from repetition.
- Let them know that you have heard what they have been saying, and try to direct them to another task or activity that is enjoyable.
- Set up a timetable to limit the time spent on activities that get repeated over and over again.
- Try to keep your patience.
- If you start feeling stressed, walk away and give yourself a time out.
- Note the triggers that might cause an activity to be repeated and try to avoid those situations. For example, if driving past a familiar takeaway food outlet makes the person repeatedly ask for food, select another route.

Questions to ask your health professional

- What is the cause of the perseveration?
- Is it related to the tumour itself?
- Is it related to the treatments given for the tumour or other medications?
- Could the perseveration be an unrelated medical condition and does this need treatment in itself?
- Do I/we expect the perseveration to get better or worse over time?
- Are there any medications that can help the problem?
- Will a psychologist be able to help treat this problem?
- Are there any diet or lifestyle factors that can help with the perseveration?

Links to other information

- <http://braininjury.org.au/portal/fact-sheets/perseveration---fact-sheet.html>