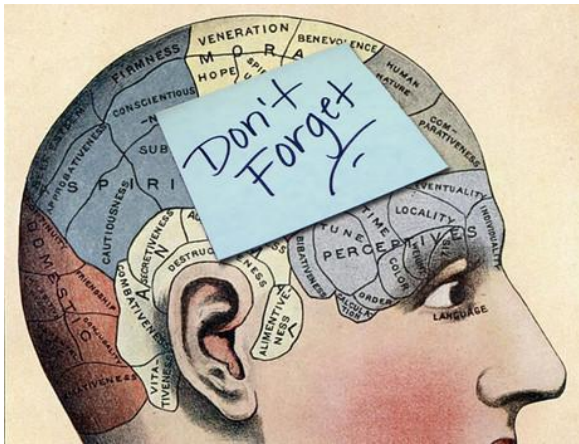


Memory

Memory problems are a common part of many psychiatric conditions, including mood disorders, attention deficit disorder, anxiety, and addictions. Frustratingly, memory issues often continue even after recovering from depression, anxiety, or achieving sobriety.

The good news is that most of these memory problems don't worsen or turn into dementia, and there are things you can do to improve them.



Sleep, eat, and walk

Sleeping at least 8 hours a night improves memory, attention, and creative problem solving. Don't think that applies to you? Think again – when people are sleep deprived they also lose awareness of the mistakes they are making.

Walking briskly (a little less than a jog) at least 45 minutes every other day helps cognition and protects the brain's memory center. Brain scientists know of no better way to improve memory than this one.

A diet low in saturated fats and simple sugars has similar effects. Good options include the DASH and Mediterranean diet. Weight loss also improves memory because obesity causes inflammation in the brain. Lowering

calories and eating more fiber and protein are the best ways to lose weight; read more at: moodtreatmentcenter.com/easyweightloss.pdf

Foods rich in flavanols, such as green or black tea, berries, and dark chocolate, are also good for memory.

Memory aids

Think ahead about what kind of external aids will help you manage memory problems and develop a habit with the ones that work for you. Popular strategies include journals, lists, calendars, apps, and post-it notes.

Alarms are useful to remind us of things in the moment, such as cooking tasks, or important events like appointments and birthdays.

If something is critical, ask someone you trust to help you remember it, but don't rely on others as a general practice.

A memory journal

Set aside a brief time each morning to record important information in a journal. This is one of the most effective techniques for memory problems. The act of writing things down can sharpen memory and focus. Some ideas to include in a memory journal:

- Tasks to do, broken down into steps you need to do to complete them
- Appointments for the day
- Shopping lists
- Wellness activities to do, like walking and taking medication
- A rating of your mood

Revisit the journal in the evening to record major events of the day and scratch things off your to-do list.

Mental strategies

Break things down into smaller bits of information. We use this technique with phone numbers, so that 3367227266 becomes (336) 722-7266.

Group things you need to remember into categories, such as grocery lists organized by type of food.

Categorization can also help your physical space so you're less likely to lose things. Organize your home so things are stored in places that make intuitive sense.

Remembering names

There's a reason names are so hard to remember – it simply isn't natural. Learning a new name calls on the same brain circuits as learning a new language, and that isn't easy for older people (that is, anyone older than 5).

For most of human history people simply called each other whatever came into their mind, like "big guy" or "quiet one." Last names are a relatively recent invention, and their origins as easy-to-recall descriptions are still apparent. Some are occupations (Smith, Baker), relationships (son-of-John becomes Johnson), or physical characteristics (Short, Brown, Armstrong).

Today, you can't just call people whatever comes into your head, but you can use that random idea to make associations that will help you recall their name. Keep those private, and don't be afraid to use colorful or humorous associations. Rhymes, physical characteristics, or associations with a celebrity or friend whom they remind you of are common techniques (even some presidents use them).

So if you meet a six-foot-tall woman named Tina, she's "Tall Tina"; if she has long brown hair and a quick wit, she's "Tina Fey"; if she reminds you of your Dad's sister she's "Aunt Tina"; and if she acts a little too much like royalty she's "Tina Queena."

Other ways to remember names include repeating them to yourself after you first meet and using the person's name in conversation.

Practice

Staying mentally active will help your memory. Sudoku puzzles, word games, visual puzzles, card and board games, and playing

musical instruments are all helpful. Computer apps have been developed to improve memory. Two examples used in research are:

www.cognifit.com, www.brainhq.com

Other popular versions:

www.lumosity.com, www.elevateapp.com

www.fitbrains.com, www.brainhq.com

Practice these regularly, for 20-60 minutes a day, to build results.

Therapy

The tips in this brochure were derived from a therapy program cognition called *Functional Remediation Therapy*. They are meant to be practiced daily with professional guidance. The tips also need to be personalized – some may not work well, or may not be needed, depending on your cognitive abilities.

—Chris Aiken, M.D., updated 1/2/2017