

Improving Your Memory

Many people experience forgetfulness as they age. Often, this is mild, but it can be frustrating. The following tips may help improve your memory.

- **Pay attention.** Concentrate when you meet someone new. Repeat the name aloud or to yourself. Try to associate it with something about the person that stands out (e.g., elegant Ellen, tall Tom). Another strategy is to introduce that person to someone else. This can reinforce your memory of the name.
- **Use mnemonics.** These are memory aids. To remember that dessert has two s's, you can think that it has two because most people want two servings of dessert. To spell luggage, associate it with "Get a good grip on your luggage." A commonly used acronym is TGIF for "thank goodness it's Friday." Most of us remember the days in a month by saying "30 days hath September, April, June, and November." With practice, you'll be able to use your own mnemonics to remember things that are important to you. Start by creating one for a number you frequently look up.
- **Chunk numbers.** Do you forget a phone number by the time you cross the room to dial it? Try chunking a few numbers together in smaller groups. It's easier to remember 725 and 3591, than 7253591.
- **Visualize things.** For example, visualize what you were doing when you last remember having something you are looking for. "I came into the house, hung up my coat, and began to go through the mail." You know you had your briefcase with you when you came into the house, but can't remember where you put it. Ask yourself the following questions: Did I put it in the closet when I hung up my coat? Did I put it in the room where I looked at the mail? Visualization can help spark a memory.
- **Establish routines.** Keep your keys in one standard place and always put them in that spot when you finish using them. For example, if you decide to keep your keys in the kitchen, put them in a specific location in the kitchen. Do chores in the same order everyday. For example, put yesterday's newspapers in the recycle bin on your way out first thing in the morning. Keep a running list of household items you are out of and add to it as you use the last of something so that you have a running list when you go to the grocery store. Write the location of your car on the parking lot ticket or associate the level and aisle with something familiar (level 3 = three grandchildren; aisle b = Boston). If you always do these things, they'll become habit and you won't have to remember them.
- **Review beforehand.** If you will be attending a social event and are worried that you won't remember the names of people you have already met, ask your hostess for the guest list. Visualize the people who will be going. Confirm someone's appearance with the hostess if you are unsure. "Is Shelly your friend who has red hair?"
- **Challenge your mind.** This is a long-term commitment to enhancing your memory and your ability to think and concentrate. Take up a new hobby or learn a new skill. Doing cross word puzzles and playing card games like bridge, or board games like Scrabble, can stimulate your memory and improve your attention span.
- **Write it down.** Keep a calendar with all your appointments and social engagements. Use your phone or computer to provide reminders for daily appointments or important dates. Write down the name of the book a friend recommended. Make a list of chores and errands to do on the weekend.

- **Review your diet.** Are you eating a balanced diet? Keep a record of what you eat for a week or so and ask your doctor to review it with you. You may not be getting enough proteins, vitamins, and minerals.
- **Limit alcohol.** Alcohol can interfere with short-term memory. Ask your doctor if the amount you regularly drink could impact your memory. If you find that you don't remember what happened after you have had some drinks, you might want to limit the number of drinks you have.
- **Get your rest.** Ask your doctor about a sleeping pill if you have trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep. Try to establish a nighttime routine so that your body becomes conditioned for sleep around the same time every night.
- **Review your medications.** Some medicines can cause forgetfulness. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if any of the medicines you are taking can have this side effect. You can also look them up on the Internet or in your public library. If you have difficulty remembering when to take your medications, invest in a weekly pillbox to organize your pills for each day of the week.

