

Memory Tips & Exercises

Any concern about memory or thinking problems should prompt you to set up a medical check-up with a physician who is an expert in brain function. The physician may discover and easily treat simple problems that interfere with memory function. Easy to treat are low thyroid, low vitamin B12 or D, folate, and most chronic infections. Other recommendations:

1. Eat healthy food and drink enough water (10-12 glasses a day unless the physician restricts fluids for a heart, circulation or kidney problem).
2. If you are taking a medicine that interferes with your memory and thinking functions, contact your physician or health provider about stopping the medicine immediately or slowly (some medicines need to be stopped slowly). Discuss changing to a medicine that does not interfere with memory or other thinking functions.
3. With a physician's OK, do physical exercise such as walking or bicycling, 30 minutes a day for 5 days a week.

In addition to a physician's medical recommendations to treat health problems, such as high blood pressure or diabetes, the following memory tips and exercises should help.

General Memory Tips

Use all your memory systems as much as possible to gather information through different ways, whenever appropriate and safe, to make stronger memories:

- ◆ **Listen** – use your hearing (auditory) memory system. If you are supposed to wear hearing aids, **wear them**.
- ◆ **Look** – use your seeing (visual) memory system. Keep your regular eye checkups to make sure to catch eye problems such as cataracts, glaucoma or retina changes early. Make sure your eyeglasses are right for your current vision.
- ◆ **Touch** – use your touch (tactile) memory system; focus on what you touch details.
- ◆ **Smell** – use your smell (olfactory) memory system and remember the fragrance coming from a flower or food that you see and are discussing.
- ◆ **Taste** – use your taste (gustatory) memory system and focus on the different flavors of food in your mouth.

Pay close attention to the information you are trying to remember. Focus on one detail or task at a time. Shut off the television, radio, cell phone or smart phone and close the windows to shut off the outside noise that may distract you.

- ◆ **Repeat** the information to yourself and think about how it links to something you already know.
- ◆ **Say it out loud:** when you answer a question, first repeat the important words in the question and then add your response.
- ◆ When you hear someone's name, say the name to yourself while looking carefully at the person's face, and then begin your sentence with the person's name before adding other information.

Stay positive. Let your feelings help. Positive feelings help the memory. Find value and become curious and interested in the information. Get excited about working to remember the items or names on a list; first try to remember a list of two for a few days, then try three items, etc.

Remember that **stress can decrease memory sharpness**, so relax and stay positive. If you start to feel frustrated, stop, relax, take a few deep breaths, say or do something different, and relax for a while. Try again a few hours later, the next day, the next week, or let it go. When you cannot remember a detail, take a few deep breaths and think positively with self-messages, such as “How important is the exact word?” or “I’ll come back to that name later.” or “I’ll explain it a different way.”

Specific Memory Tip: Write down an item or name of a person as you think of it. Keep that note with other notes in a special place for all such notes. Do not leave notes all over the office, house, or car. **Create a Memory Place**, such as on the corner of your desk or kitchen counter or on the refrigerator door. Also helpful is a **Memory Box**, a small box where specific notes or items are always kept, for example, a small Memory Box by the door where you keep the house keys or car keys or a Memory Box on a bureau where a wristwatch is kept whenever you are not wearing it.

To use this memory tip as a daily memory exercise: Practice placing items at the Memory Place (such as your purse, eyeglasses or jewelry on your bureau top or in a Memory Box whenever you take them off). Put your watch, keys or coins in the Memory Box each time you empty your pockets.

Memory Exercises

Learn something new every day or once a week. New information stimulates the brain more than information you already know well. Learn a new word every day; repeat the word memorized the day before and add a new word the next day. Or try one new word a week. Learn the words to a new song or poem, the music of a new tune, or the steps of a new sport or exercise. With a family member or friend learn how to play a new board game or card game.

Do memory exercises that are positive and fun so that you will want to do them. If you like flowers, each day learn the name of a different flower. If you like cars, learn the name (make) of a different car. If you like board games such as checkers or chess, occasionally try some new moves and play with a different person who will keep it fun. Play a familiar card game or board game and change the rules a little to keep the game challenging or make up new silly, fun rules.

Being Organized

Organize your setting and your schedule. Keep things where they belong. If the shoes belong by the back door, that’s where they should be when not on your feet. If mail belongs on the corner of your desk, that’s where it should stay until you open it, take care of it or discard it.

Stick to a routine daily schedule and a routine way of doing activities and tasks.

Finally, as heartbreaking as it is, get rid of clutter. The fewer objects in your way, the easier for you to remember what you want to do, where to find an item, and the steps to do a task.

Above all, keep a healthy lifestyle to keep your memory system as healthy as possible.

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