

MEMORY POWER

You go into your living room and you forget what you went there for. This happens to you more than once and you start to wonder if you have Alzheimer's. Don't worry. A minor degree of forgetfulness is a normal part of aging. Very few people actually develop Alzheimer's or other degenerative brain disease. There is no need to be overly anxious if you forget things once in a while. Improving your memory takes practice.

How Does Memory Work?

Memory involves the work of billions of nerve cells (neurons) in the brain. Neural activities in the brain enable us to process incoming information and retrieve stored information quickly. How the initial experience is encoded in the brain determines whether the experience will be remembered or forgotten.

Memory involves three processes: registration, retention, and retrieval.

REGISTRATION is the ability to receive new information via the five senses (vision, hearing, touch, smell, and taste). The information is stored in the brain for later retrieval.

RETENTION is the ability to hold or store new information, which can be retained in short-term memory or long-term memory. Short-term memory usually lasts for a few minutes and the information is discarded, e.g. a person's name or telephone number. Long-term memory can be retained for a lifetime, such as childhood experiences.

RETRIEVAL is the process in which stored information is recalled or recovered.

What Affects Memory?

People in their 50's or 60's generally begin to experience a decline in their ability to remember things. This age-associated memory

impairment appears to affect short-term memory more than long-term memory. The process of retrieval also slows down with age. Other factors affecting memory include:

- Some prescription drugs
- Fatigue; insomnia
- Depression
- Poor nutrition
- Hearing and/or vision problem
- Alcohol overuse
- Brain trauma
- Certain diseases, e.g. diabetes, hypertension
- External distractions, e.g. noise
- Internal distractions, e.g. physical discomfort, emotions, stress

Memory Improvement Tips

Just as regular physical exercise helps your body to stay healthy, being mentally active helps your mind and memory to stay fit. Here are some ways to help you improve your memory:

1. Make up rhymes or songs
2. Compose a mental picture
3. Apply association. By linking new information with something that is already stored in long-term memory, your chance of remembering increases. For instance, you have just been introduced to a group of people and the only name you can remember is Sally because your sister's name is Sally. Your mind has automatically associated the new Sally with the old Sally.
4. Make use of the five senses to store new information, whenever possible. For example, when you meet someone new, find the person's unique characteristics by studying the person's face and paying attention to his/her voice. Wear prescription glasses or hearing aid when necessary

5. Repeat and rehearse new information
6. Eat a healthy diet. A poor diet can affect your overall health. There is no magic food or pill that can boost your memory. Contrary to traditional beliefs, eating animal brains will not improve your memory. In fact, animal brains are high in cholesterol and may clog up your arteries
7. Get adequate rest. Concentration and learning decrease when you're tired
8. Exercise your mind
 - Learn to play a musical instrument
 - Learn a new language
 - Do crossword puzzle
 - Talk with friends and family
 - Be a volunteer
 - Start a new hobby
 - Read a newspaper
9. Exercise your body
Research shows that physical activity keeps you more alert. Exercise increases the flow of blood to your brain, heart and muscles. Make it fun and do it often.
 - Go for a walk
 - Play with your children or grandchildren
 - Take the stairs instead of the elevator

- Practice Tai Chi or Loo Tung Chuan

Other Techniques To Help You Remember

1. Use memory aids:
 - Calendar or appointment books to keep track of birthdays, doctor's appointment, payment due dates, etc. timer or alarm clocks to remind you to turn things on and off.
 - Notebooks to make lists and to write things down.
 - Medication organizers (boxes) to help you remember when to take your medications.
2. Organize your home. Use file cabinets or drawers to keep important documents, bills, bank statements, etc. in order.
3. Designate a specific place for your personal items such as eyeglasses, wallet, and keys. Always put them in the same place each time.
4. Ask friends or family members to remind you

If you feel like you're forgetting too much, stay calm and give yourself extra time to remember. Through training and awareness, it is possible to improve memory at any age.