

I Just Can't Remember

Everyone is forgetful at times. We have all mislaid our keys or lost our car in a parking garage. To help us remember, we utilize various tools – writing appointments on a calendar, tying a string around our finger or putting a Post-It on the refrigerator. Sometimes we forget a name of a former teacher (long-term memory), but more often it is recent information (short-term memory) which eludes us.

Changes in memory in later life are due to a combination of factors including changes in the brain and central nervous system, certain medical conditions, reaction to specific medications, simple disuse or reduced mental challenges. There are many reasons for forgetting:

- Distraction
- Sensory losses (hearing and vision)
- Emotional factors (anxiety and depression)
- Fatigue

Each of these reasons may have an easy treatment – slow down and pay closer attention, get new glasses, receive counseling and get enough rest. In addition, there are some helpful hints to aid in remembering:

- Write things down
- Replace things in the same place each time
- Repeat new information over & over
- Keep a positive attitude

Memory loss can also indicate a more serious medical problem. It is important to get an accurate diagnosis and initiate appropriate treatment. Your primary care physician can begin the evaluation. S/he may recommend a Memory Disorders Clinic for a more in-depth assessment of your mental (cognitive) functioning.

If you or a family member/friend does have a memory disorder, there are ways to improve your memory or help manage better:

- Use your strengths, such as organizational skills
- Try to keep a regular daily routine
- Use memory aids such as a calendar, watch, bedside clock and notebook
- Follow your doctor's orders
- Maintain good sleeping habits to decrease fatigue
- Maintain or improve good nutritional habits
- Get emotional support from family, friends or professionals

Remember that there are many ways to enhance your memory. If you feel that your efforts to help yourself are not effective, you may want to seek help.

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