

## Healthy Habits = a Healthy Memory

Several factors cause aging brains to experience changes in their ability to retain and retrieve memories:

- ▶ Get regular exercise. Regular exercise increases oxygen to the brain, reduces the risk of disorders that may lead to memory loss, and may actually enhance the effect of helpful brain chemicals that protect brain cells.
- ▶ Manage stress. Stress not only makes it difficult to concentrate, but can actually lead to dangerous levels of cortisol, a hormone that can damage the brain.
- ▶ Get enough sleep. Sleep is necessary for memory consolidation and prolonged lack of sleep can result in difficulties concentrating.
- ▶ Don't smoke. Smoking heightens the risk of vascular disorders that can cause stroke and constrict arteries that deliver oxygen to the brain.
- ▶ Limit alcohol use. Impaired memory may result after only one or two drinks. On the other hand, heavy drinking can have permanent, far-reaching effects on the brain, including persistent memory problems, mental confusion and psychosis.



## Eat Your Way to Improved Memory

Studies indicate that certain foods may have positive effects on memory and brain health. Some of these include:

- ▶ Egg yolks contain choline, a nutrient essential to brain function and health.
- ▶ Spinach helps protect the brain from age-related decline and may lessen brain damage from strokes and neurological disorders.
- ▶ Yellow fin tuna is a rich source of omega-3 fatty acids and niacin, a combination that may protect against Alzheimer's disease.
- ▶ Cranberries may protect brain cells from free-radical damage and boost memory, balance and coordination.
- ▶ Sweet potatoes are rich in antioxidant nutrients which improve cognitive function.
- ▶ Strawberries may help protect against age-related brain function decline and boost learning capacity.
- ▶ Kidney beans affect cognitive function and may also improve symptoms of depression and mood disorders.
- ▶ Raisin bran contains iron, calcium and other important nutrients for brain fuel, as well as health and vitality.
- ▶ Lamb loin is rich in vitamin B12 and iron, which may improve concentration and mental performance.
- ▶ Wheat germ is rich in antioxidant nutrients as well as choline and magnesium, which contribute to brain health.

Source: <http://www.thedietchannel.com/food-for-thought.htm>

## Additional Online Resources

The Internet is a great source of information on this important subject. For some additional insights and ideas related to memory loss and memory enrichment, consider the following:

### AARP

1-888-OUR-AARP

(687-2277)

[www.aarp.org/health](http://www.aarp.org/health)

### Mental Health America

1-800-969-6642

[www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)

### Alzheimer's Association – Greater Illinois Chapter

1-800-272-3900

[www.alz.org/illinois/index.asp](http://www.alz.org/illinois/index.asp)

### Alzheimer's Foundation of America

1-866-AFA-8484

[www.alzfdn.org](http://www.alzfdn.org)

To order additional complimentary copies of this pamphlet, call **708-371-0400 Ext. 1214.**

*This educational pamphlet compliments of  
The Crestwood Senior Education Institute*

*Proudly sponsored by*

  
**C R E S T W O O D**  
Care Centre

©2009 MDU, Inc. All Rights Reserved

14255 South Cicero Avenue, Crestwood, IL 60445

2036.309

708-371-0400

[www.crestwoodcare.com](http://www.crestwoodcare.com)

# Maintaining Memory

*Tips and techniques for keeping your gray matter in the pink*



*This educational pamphlet is provided compliments of  
The Crestwood Senior Education Institute*

*Proudly sponsored by*

  
**C R E S T W O O D**  
Care Centre

As we age, most people will experience the frustration of forgetting a name, not recalling where we put our keys, or wondering whether we locked the front door. While such moments of forgetfulness may cause embarrassment or brief inconvenience, in fact, they are perfectly normal and should not be assumed to be signs of early Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. These medical conditions are marked by serious memory problems that affect a person's ability to carry out activities of everyday living such as driving, shopping or handling personal finances.

### Signs of serious memory problems

- ▶ Asking the same questions over and over again
- ▶ Becoming lost in places you know well
- ▶ Inability to follow directions
- ▶ Extreme confusion about time, people and places
- ▶ Neglecting yourself by eating poorly, not bathing or acting unsafely

## Keeping our brains at the top of their game

When we begin to experience memory lapses, there are a number of things we can do to keep our brains working at optimum efficiency well into our later years. First, we have to understand that just like the rest of our bodies, the brain works best when it is well nourished, well rested, and exercised regularly. By eating a healthy diet, staying active, getting enough sleep and avoiding potentially harmful lifestyle choices, most of us can keep our brains sharp and our memories intact.

### First things first

In order to safeguard and enhance memory, it is helpful to understand what memory is and how it actually works.

Simply put, memory is the mental activity of recalling information that you have learned or experienced.

That simple definition, though, covers a complex process that involves many different parts of the brain and serves us in various ways.

Memory can be short-term or long-term. In the case of *short-term memory*, the mind stores information for just a few seconds or a few minutes. For example, the time it takes to dial a phone number you just looked up or to compare the prices of several items in a store. Short-term memory is designed only for temporary storage, so that the brain can always have room for new data.

*Long-term memory* involves information we have retained over the years, either because it is personally meaningful to us, or because it involves skills and routines important for our survival. Some long-term memories require a conscious effort to recall, while others are used so often they are always on the forefront of the mind. Think of it as a personal computer. The items on our *desktop* – memories related to work, everyday life, friends and family – are always available for easy access, while other long-term information needs to be accessed when needed by our mental *browsers*.



## Memory and aging

Several factors cause aging brains to experience changes in their ability to retain and retrieve memories:

- ▶ The hippocampus region of the brain is especially vulnerable to age-related deterioration, and that can affect how well you retain information.
- ▶ There's a relative loss of neurons with age, which can affect the activity of brain chemicals called neurotransmitters and their receptors.
- ▶ An older person often experiences decreased blood flow to the brain and processes nutrients that enhance brain activity less efficiently than a younger person.

In healthy older adults, these changes represent more of a *slowing* in the ability to acquire, store, and retrieve information, rather than a loss of these abilities. That means the memories you've accumulated over the years remain largely intact, but retrieving them may take a little longer.

## Exercising your brain

Most memory problems stem from either an inability to retain new information or an inability to access existing memories. Because memory is much like muscle strength, the more you exercise your brain, the better you'll be able to process and remember information. Here are some simple ways to give your brain a healthy workout:

- ▶ *Break your routines*, for example, brush your teeth with your non-dominant hand to activate new neural connections.
- ▶ *Try doing usual routines in unusual ways*, like trying to guess what you're eating simply by taste.

- ▶ *Take a course in a subject you don't know much about*, learn a new game requiring strategic thinking, or cook some recipes from an unfamiliar cuisine.
- ▶ *Think about things from a different perspective*, for example, try examining a long-held belief from another point of view.
- ▶ *Play a video game* that involves problem solving.

## Simple steps for enhancing your memory

In addition to exercising your brain, there are some basic things you can do to maintain or improve your ability to retain and retrieve memories:

- ▶ *Pay attention* to information you want to retain.
- ▶ *Make associations* with something already familiar.
- ▶ *Know your learning style*. Some people learn best by seeing or reading, others learn best through hearing, and others actually retain information better by working with their hands. By understanding your learning style, you can use it to retain information more effectively.
- ▶ *Involve as many senses as possible*. Read out loud. Make a poem out of information you want to recall. Or make unusual visual associations with words or names you want to remember.
- ▶ *Organize information*. Write important information down in address books, datebooks or on calendars so you'll know where to find it. Put a calendar with important dates in a prominent place where you'll see it every day.
- ▶ *Focus on understanding basic ideas* rather than memorizing isolated details, and be able to explain it in your own words.