

Strategies to Improve Memory

Do you ever feel as if your brainpower is waning? You are not alone. Stress, lack of sleep, and hectic lifestyles all contribute. Fortunately, memory lapses are rarely signs of a neurological disorder such as Alzheimer's disease, and much more often are the result of normal changes in the brain. Contrary to what was once believed, brains add new cells and make new connections throughout life. Try the following strategies to assist your brain in retaining information:



- Improve your organizational techniques by writing down appointments and having designated places for keys, wallets, and other essentials.
- Exercise! Aerobic activities, especially, appear to increase brain volume.
- Maintain a healthy diet especially strong in antioxidants and omega 3's. Go for almonds, walnuts, blueberries, salmon, and sardines! Avoid saturated fats and trans fats which clog your arteries.
- Make up acronyms and rhymes to help remember facts and names.
- Stop smoking. Although the reason is unclear, research shows people who stop smoking have less cognitive decline than those who continue.
- Change your routine. Use the opposite hand for writing or the computer mouse. You can stimulate brain-cell growth by requiring your brain to focus on what has been an automatic behavior.
- Get plenty of sleep. While sleeping, your brain is busy consolidating memories. Treating yourself to relaxing scents like vanilla or lavender before bed will help reduce the stress hormone cortisol.
- Reach outside your comfort zone: learn a new language, play a new game, take a course to challenge your brain.
- Listen to music. It will lower the stress hormones that impede memory while elevating your mood and improving focus.
- Do puzzles and brainteasers. Try the ones on the newspaper's comic pages, get a book of Sudoku puzzles, or dig out old jigsaw puzzles.
- If you retire, volunteer! Whether it is working with fourth graders, answering questions at a hospital help desk, or leading tours at a museum, you will learn new facts and benefit from the social interaction.
- Try meditation to relieve stress, improve focus, and help memory.
- Try ballroom dancing. Learning new ways to move, socializing, and the physical exercise make this activity a triple whammy.
- Be an optimist! Positive thinking keeps you clear, alert, and focused.

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