



Tips on Healthy Ageing

Memory

What changes can we expect in our memory with healthy ageing?

- As we get older, the most common change that we complain about is memory change.
- Knowledge about how memory changes in healthy ageing is a lot more positive than in the past.
- Memory change with healthy ageing certainly doesn't interfere with everyday life in a dramatic way.
- Everyone is different, and the effect of getting older on memory is different for each person.
- Recent research describes the effect of getting older on attention processes, on the ability to get new information into storage, on the time it takes to retrieve information and on "tip of the tongue" experiences.
- Research also suggests that older memories or lifetime memories do not change as we get older.

Memory Health

How healthy your memory is depends quite a bit on how healthy you are. We all notice fluctuations in our ability to remember from time to time. Your memory might seem less efficient when you are very sick, emotionally stressed or excessively busy. Your physical and emotional well-being strongly influences the way that your memory processes work.

Take the time to run through this memory health check:

- Are you taking any medication, and if so, do you know if it can affect your memory?
- Is your vision or hearing impaired in any way?
- Do you have chronic pain?
- Is your sleep disturbed?
- Are you experiencing a high level of stress or anxiety?
- Could your hormone levels be altered at the moment?
- Do you think you might be depressed?
- Is your workload too heavy?
- Do you drink too much alcohol, or use drugs to excess?

If you are worried about your memory and you answered yes to any of these questions, it might be time to take action. Of course there are sometimes factors that are beyond your control, but there are often things that you can do with your health, lifestyle and emotional balance that can help you get more out of your memory. Consult your doctor if you have any health concerns.

Memory Strategies

Most people use memory strategies to get the most out of their memory. We can divide these strategies into two types – those that we do “inside our heads” (internal strategies) and those that we do “outside our heads” (external strategies). Using these strategies makes us feel more confident that we will remember important information.

Internal strategies

- Can be very simple, such as repetition of information, or quite complicated, like using complex mnemonic techniques.
- These strategies all have a similar aim – to focus our attention on the information to be remembered.
- We can do this by adding meaning to the information. For example, we might learn a name by making an association to another similar name.
- The more deeply you process information the more likely you will recall it later – this is why we are better at remembering things that we find interesting or very emotional.
- Fluctuations in attention are the most common explanations for fluctuating memory abilities. The best internal strategy that we can use is to ‘pay attention to paying attention!’

External strategies

- Are often more useful for everyday remembering.
- We use diaries, calendars, notebooks, nametags and shopping lists as reminders.
- Some people like to use their mobile phone, electronic notebook or computer for reminders.
- Others use oven timers to remind them to do something.
- Many people keep their medications in a Dosette box or Webster pack from the chemist to help remember which medication to take, at what time on what day.

Memory friendly environments

- We are all busy trying to remember a vast amount of information these days.
- We can take the load off our memory by making changes to our environment in our homes, at work and in our community.
- For example, we don’t need to remember to turn irons or kettles off if they automatically switch themselves off.
- We can stick step-by-step instructions on any new equipment, to help us to remember how to use it.
- Shopping centers can have location maps to help us remember where particular shops are.
- Multi story car parks can have colourful, zoned signage to help us remember where our car is parked.

Think about your home, local area or workplace – how can you change something to make the environment more memory friendly?

These tips are based on the book:

“Remembering Well: How memory works and what to do when it doesn’t” by Delys Sargeant and Anne Unkenstein, Second Edition 2001, Allen and Unwin

See the Alzheimer’s Association website <http://www.alzheimers.org.au> for further information about memo