

Dementia Advice: Memory Guide

What to do if you are worried about your memory or the memory of someone close to you

We ALL make memory mistakes all the time- one mistake is just one mistake but if you or a person you care about has been more forgetful in the past twelve months to the extent that it has significantly affected their life then it is likely to be helpful to discuss it with your GP and seek a referral to the Community Memory Service.

There are medications that **might** be helpful but they are not suitable for everybody and they do not make huge differences. They might help a bit, but that little bit over a long period can be very valuable.

Very few people have no memory. This guide can help people who have a “wobbly” memory, which can arise from many different causes.

This guide will help you to prop up the “wobbly” bits with some tried and tested techniques.

Helping someone remember

- Do not let the other person cast around for a random right answer, this starts a new memory for the wrong information!

Try

- First letter cues
- Retracing steps/activities
- Giving information in manageable chunks

Suggest

- Writing important information down, this acts as a back up and reduces anxiety
- That the person has spent time paying attention to the information
- A white board where all useful information is held (lots of scraps of paper and note books are recipes for disaster!)
- The person looks at the white board / notebook rather than you tell them

General rules for helping your memory

- Actors do not learn their lines by magic, they learn by rehearsing them
- Memory tips / techniques are not magic but they are ways of helping people to remember that have been around since the Ancient Greeks.
- It is very hard to remember information if you have not paid attention to it
Samuel Johnson said- 'the art of memory is the art of attention'
- You need to register the information before you store it, to be able to retrieve it ie remember it
- You can rehearse things by repeating them, writing them down, imagining them and embellishing them

Wondering whether I have done things

We all have episodes when we wonder whether we have turned off water, the iron, gas or have locked doors.

If you are fretful about this

- When you do the task and say out loud to yourself "it is I am locking/ turning off"
- Imagine yourself doing the task as if you are doing it with a giant hand!

This sounds a bit silly but it really DOES work!

Taking your medicines safely

1. Keep your tablets safe and organised in one place
2. Use a dosette box or blister pack if you are someone who forgets whether you have taken your tablets
3. Ask for help in organising and taking you your tablets – this is not a sign of weakness.
4. Keep to routines and structures – no need to re-invent the wheel.

5. Plan ahead especially for holidays or if you have people staying as this can play havoc with your routines.
6. Make sure someone else knows where your tablets are and exactly what you should be taking
7. Heed advice from the Memory Service Nurse!
 - Do not stockpile any medicines
 - Destroy or return medicines that you no longer need now
 - Ask your doctor to make your medicines as simple as possible
 - If you are having difficulty reading the instructions, tell them when you collect your prescription
 - Do not rely on sizes, shapes or colours of tablets as these can sometimes change.

IMPORTANT

Medicines are prescribed to help with a particular problem. You need to remember to take them and follow the instructions.

Successful parking

- Try and go at quieter times
- Think ahead about where you are going
- As you lock the car look at where you are, what are your cues, where are you opposite, what line you are in
- DO NOT say “parked next to the big blue van” it will have disappeared when you come out.
- Tie a ribbon / lace to your aerial if it sticks up, it will help you locate your own car

Remembering to do things

1. Everyday things

- In your memory place (white board, fridge door) write down the things that happen every day and the extra events eg appointments, trips, visitors.
- Have a routine for routine tasks
- Cross off each day on the calendar when you go to bed – then you know where you are on it

2. Out of the ordinary things

- Make something strange/odd until you have done it eg wear a watch or ring on the wrong hand, tie a knot in you petticoat, put a pebble in your pocket, a penny in the sole of your shoe
- Make a mental image of yourself doing the task eg taking the parcel to the post
- Make a list of out of the ordinary things to do the next day before bed or going out
- Sit down and talk about the “plan of action” for the day and the approximate times

Remembering names

We all struggle with this more as we get older because we have met many , hundreds of people during our lives.

THINK!

- Do you need to remember this persons name, if so , ask them to repeat it, perhaps write it down
- Pay attention to where you hear it

- What they looked like – do they have a feature that helps with their name (NB you do not tell them this!)
- Can you make a funny link with their name to conjure up a dotty image (Books always use obvious ones for this eg Mr Baker, Archer, Knight. It is harder for names like Johnson, Bradley but trying will help you to remember as the act of trying to remember is a form of rehearsal)
- Never be afraid to say “I know I should know you but I have temporarily forgotten it” . You will both be relieved.

Finding things

Your mother was right

“A place for everything and everything in its place “ is the best memory tip ever

- Keep your keys in one place and develop the habit of putting them there straight away
- Put labels on cupboards
- Retrace your steps
- Think about what you were doing when you last used them.
- If something appears very lost, sit down, have a cup of tea, think about where you last had the item, retrace your steps and actions. (This may include looking in the fridge or turning out the dustbin)
- Ladies- think about which handbag you were using and similarly for coats.

Concentrating

Thinking “I must remember all this “is a big task, instead try and break the information down in to the 4 W’s

W – What is the story about – the gist, the bare bones

W – Who was involved

W – When did it happen

W – Where did it happen

You might want to try another W – why did it happen but this is high falutin' stuff.

This is the way journalists are taught and will help you retrieve the information.

Successful Shopping

To shop successfully you need to

- Remember what you need
- Purchase what you need

Have a place in the kitchen (notepad, whiteboard) where you write down items you will need. You may not use Worcester Sauce every day, but it might be a vital ingredient to a recipe.

Before shopping look in your fridge, cupboards, freezer and This will help to prompt purchasing appropriate amounts. Write your note.

You might want to divide it into sections.

- Think about where you regularly shop and write your list according to the route through the shop
- Use your list while you are shopping.
- Check your list before you reach the checkout.
- Just shopping for “bits and pieces” – same principles. Write the list and **use** it!

Extended Practice

This is a useful memory technique but it is time consuming. Only use this for crucial information eg phone numbers, car registrations, new additions to the family, birthdays. It sounds posh but is really only lots (and lots!) of rehearsals.

You will need help with this – someone who can be with you throughout the day. We will call them the “supporter”(S) P is the person with the ‘wobbly memory’

We will use a phone number as an example but it could be any short bit of important information. It goes like this:-

S) The phone number for X is

What is the phone number?
P)

Repeat with

- Delay 5 seconds and repeat
- Delay 10 seconds and repeat
- Delay 30 seconds and repeat
- Delay 60 seconds and repeat
- Delay 2 minutes and repeat
- Delay 5 minutes and repeat
- Delay 10 minutes and repeat
- Delay 20 minutes and repeat
- Delay 40 minutes and repeat
- Delay 60 minutes and repeat
- Delay 1½ hours and repeat
- Delay 2 hours and repeat
- Delay 3 hours and repeat
- Next morning

If you forget the answer you go back to the length of delay at which you were last successful.

It does work!

Family can help but it must be light-hearted and fun. It is not a test but a way of practising much more than we would normally do.

Having a ‘wobbly’ memory in hospital

Having a relative admitted to hospital is never an easy time. Sometimes, because the person is ill their memory and thinking appears to be much worse and this can be frightening for the patient and also for visitors. By taking the person out of their regular environment and routine the admission can reveal memory problems that had previously been hidden in a life of strong routine and predictability. During the person stay in hospital memory and thinking will be monitored by some short ‘memory questions’ – please do not practise these with your relative!

There are things that can help your relative in hospital if their memory is ‘wobbly’.

- A large A4 book which acts as a 3 way communication between the patient, visitors/relatives and staff
- You can write down who has come to visit and when. It is helpful if significant events are in here eg Joanie brought the flowers, James

brought the toffee. This helps the next visitors to have a point of contact- have you any left? May I have one etc.

- It is helpful- if you know – to write down who might come next and when- that might be. This will help staff to give helpful reassurance by saying- look, your daughter has written here that she will be back to see you on...it is always helpful to have the day of the week rather than just the date
- You can help by reminding your relative where the calendar board is on the ward.
- Visiting can be hard work and sometimes we run out of things to talk about. Please don't be afraid of bringing some treasures in from home to talk about. Reminiscing like this can make the person feel very safe and valued when life in hospital can feel a bit tough and hard work. Please do not leave personal treasures on the ward- write in the book what you brought and to where it is returned.
- Don't be afraid of bringing in things to do that the person is familiar with doing.eg cards, scrabble, Connect 4. Be warned though- an admission to hospital is NOT the time to suggest Soduko or a crosswords if the person has never done it but it is good practice to continue if it has been part of their routine.
- Listen to things together- an earphone each means that you both still listen to the Archers, or music. Familiar poetry is also useful. Some people like to be read to.
- Don't feel that you have to chat and entertain all the time- sometimes just having the comfort of a hand held is enough.
- Be mindful that visitors can be tiring- if you are leaving, give the person some warning and think together about anything that might be needed.
- Speak to the nurses and therapists about how you might help the person with their rehabilitation so that the person has the same message eg about using a frame to walk from everybody!
- Please tell staff if you think that your relative may have had some problems with their memory before their current illness or incident that brought them into hospital this will help us to think about future care.