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# Kick Memory Loss to the Curb with These Simple Strategies

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Sunglasses atop your head, cellphone pressed to your ear and keys in your hand, yet you're running late because you're frantically searching the house for your sunglasses, cellphone and keys. If this sounds like you then you may be getting older. Everyone is getting older, but that doesn't mean that short-term memory loss is inevitable. You can keep your mind sharp well into your senior years.

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## When Is It Simple Memory Loss in Older Adults and When Is It Dementia?

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While our occasional "senior moments" might make for great self-deprecating humor, actual dementia is no laughing matter. Research has shown (<https://www.dementiacarecentral.com/resource/more-than-3-million-people-have-dementia-in-the-u-s/>) that more than 3 million Americans suffer from some sort of dementia. After the age of 71, dementia is seen in about 14 percent of people. Alzheimer's disease is the most common and the best known, but there are several varieties (<https://www.alz.org/dementia/types-of-dementia.asp>), and all of them can be debilitating, burdensome and can lead to a host of other problems, like depression.

Misplacing keys and sunglasses can be a bit unsettling, and as people near the golden years, even a bit frightening. Odds are, though, that those memory loss in older adults slip-ups aren't dementia. So how do you tell when it's simple short-term memory loss or when it's dementia?

Dementia is about more (<https://www.healthline.com/health/dementia/early-warning-signs#symptoms>) than just memory loss. Warning signs affect all aspects of life, including work, family and interpersonal relationships. Sure, symptoms of dementia include those short-term memory lapses, but they also include difficulty in finding the right words, having trouble with the most basic tasks, confusion, not following conversations, etc. Dementia's warning signs lead to behavioral difficulties like mood changes, apathy and fear of change.

Here is a chart from the World Health Organization (WHO) on symptoms of dementia.

The infographic is titled "A public health priority" and is from the World Health Organization (WHO). It features a central illustration of a person's profile facing right, surrounded by five speech bubbles containing icons representing different symptoms: a teapot and cup for "Difficulties with everyday tasks"; a cable car for "Confusion in familiar environments"; a large number "48" with a question mark inside a circle for "Difficulty with words and numbers"; a clipboard with a document for "Memory loss"; and two people talking for "Changes in mood and behaviour". The background is teal, and the WHO logo is at the bottom right.

What are the symptoms?

- Difficulties with everyday tasks
- Confusion in familiar environments
- Difficulty with words and numbers
- Memory loss
- Changes in mood and behaviour

Dementia symptoms are:

- Difficulties with everyday tasks
- Confusion in familiar environments
- Difficulty with words and numbers
- Memory loss... [See More](#)

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It's sometimes said that the difference between short-term memory loss and dementia is the difference between forgetting your keys and forgetting what your keys are for. Sure, that's far too simplistic, but it's a reassuring way to look at those inevitable memory lapses.

The National Institutes of Health (<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/do-memory-problems-always-mean-alzheimers-disease>) created this helpful chart for Alzheimer's disease.

Normal Aging	Alzheimer's Disease
Making a bad decision once in a while	Making poor judgments and decisions a lot of the time
Missing a monthly payment	Problems taking care of monthly bills
Forgetting which day it is and remembering it later	Losing track of the date or time of year
Sometimes forgetting which word to use	Trouble having a conversation
Losing things from time to time	Misplacing things often and being unable to find them

(<http://keepbizzy.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Screen-Shot-2018-02-02-at-4.11.36-PM.jpg>)

## Why Does Our Short-Term Memory Fade as We Age?

Albert Einstein (<https://blog.bookstellyouwhy.com/10-surprising-facts-about-albert-einstein>), famous for his scientific genius, was also notorious for his terrible memory. He couldn't remember phone numbers or dates. According to legend, he once couldn't find his train ticket, but the conductor offered to let the world-renowned physicist ride nonetheless. Einstein declined the invitation, allegedly responding, "Thank you, but if I don't find my ticket I won't know where to get off the train."

It will probably be decades, if not centuries, before scientists unwrap the secrets of Einstein's brain (<http://phenomena.nationalgeographic.com/2014/04/21/the-tragic-story-of-how-einstens-brain-was-stolen-and-wasnt-even-special/>). One thing we do know is that the brain is finite. It is possible for it to contain too much information. Like many other organs in the body, the brain is expert at cleaning out the debris (<https://www.fastcompany.com/3059634/your-brain-has-a-delete-button-heres-how-to-use-it>). Sometimes that debris might include where you put your car keys.

Memory decline can also be a product of lifestyle habits. Heavy alcohol use, smoking, sleep deprivation, many medications and lack of proper nutrition all take tolls on brain function. Even depression and stress can make you forget things.

As with your body's muscles, your brain needs to be exercised or it will get slower and weaker. When we're young and constantly challenging ourselves, our brains don't have time to get out of shape. Once we get older, though, school becomes a distant memory and life becomes a series of routines. Mental slowdown doesn't have to be your future, and there are even steps you can take to reverse cognitive decline.

## How to Keep Your Brain in Tip-Top Shape

# 6 Ways to a Better Memory



**NCExcellence**  
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Prevent memory Loss, 6 ways to a better memory #MemoryLoss  
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11:40 AM - Jun 7, 2017

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There is no magical pills to bring back your memory, but there are several things you can do to enhance what's already there to fix what might seem broken.

Technology may be partially to blame for cognitive decline (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5403814/>). There's no longer a need to memorize phone numbers. Anything we want to learn is available with a few clicks, yet we retain little of it.

Technology might also be a fix. You can download brain games (<http://keepbizzy.com/neuroracer-game-trains-brain-multitask/>), designed to help keep your mind fresh and agile. While there's little scientific evidence that brain games do much more than train your brain to play the games, better technologies will be available in the future.

The Luddites among us, though, will be happy to know that the best brain strengthening exercises aren't performed on cellphones or computers. They can be accomplished through everyday tasks, like brushing your teeth or walking your dog.

Variety, as they say, is the spice of life. It's also great medicine for your brain. Changing things up (<http://www.businessinsider.com/brain-exercises-that-make-you-smarter-2018-1>), like basic routines, or even brushing your teeth with your non-dominant hand, will keep your brain active.

## Getting a different perspective, like turning household objects upside down, turning your head upside down, or even showering with your eyes closed can challenge your mind.

Venture down unknown trails and streets, talk to strangers, make a concerted effort to notice things you've never noticed in your everyday surroundings.

Go back to school. Challenging your intellect while surrounded by young, bright, fresh minds will get those synapses popping. If that's not in your future, take an online class, or at the very least, replace some of your screen time with reading or listening to music.

Learn a new language. Studies have shown (<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/sep/04/what-happens-to-the-brain-language-learning>) that people of all ages perform better on cognitive tests when they speak multiple languages.



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### Prevent Memory Loss With These 12 Tips

8:06 PM - Jun 27, 2017

1 See Improve memory's other Tweets

## Focus on What's Important for You to Remember

If your mind only has so much room, it makes sense that you should clean out the clutter on occasion.

Sleep is one of the most important elements in brain cleansing. Brain cells shrink up to 60 percent

(<https://www.fastcompany.com/3059634/your-brain-has-a-delete-button-heres-how-to-use-it>) after a good

night's sleep, leaving you lots of room for the next day's learning. Be careful of sleep medications

(<https://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/guide/understanding-the-side-effects-of-sleeping-pills#1>),

though. They can impair memory.

You should also pay attention to what you're paying attention to. If your mind is focused on Facebook or on family drama, it's going treat that like the priority. If push those out of mind, though, at least for part of the day, it will allow your brain to concentrate on what really matters.

## Exercise

When was the last time you read a health article that didn't advance exercise as one of the solutions? It's probably been a while. Like absolutely everything else in your body, your brain works best when you are active.

There's nothing like a brisk walk or a gym workout to make your head feel clearer (<https://www.fastcompany.com/3025957/what-happens-to-our-brains-when-we-exercise-and-how-it-makes-us-happier>), and more focused. Even beyond that, though, working out today can protect your memory 20 years in the future (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-athletes-way/201404/physical-activity-improves-cognitive-function>).

## Eat Right

Your brain is as much a part of your body as your heart is. As a matter of fact, your heart sends 12 percent of the body's blood to your brain, despite the fact that a human brain occupies just 2 percent of total body weight. It's not surprising at all that studies have shown a strong link between heart health and brain health and that a healthy diet (<http://n.neurology.org/content/early/2015/05/06/WNL.0000000000001638>) helps both. Foods such as (<https://www.webmd.com/diet/features/eat-smart-healthier-brain#2>) blueberries, salmon, avocados and even dark chocolate are literal brain food and will help keep it nourished and running smoothly.

## Supplements

Many supplements are a waste of money, but some are proven to help brain function. Fish oil, some B vitamins, turmeric and CoQ10 are just some of the supplements ([https://www.consumerlab.com/answers/do-any-supplements-help-with-brain-function/supplements\\_for\\_memory/](https://www.consumerlab.com/answers/do-any-supplements-help-with-brain-function/supplements_for_memory/)) that have demonstrated protective properties for the mind.

## Do Nothing

Perhaps the most surprising solution offered by scientists who study the brain is nothing. Literally. You might have moments of relaxation during the day, but even while you're sitting, your brain is still absorbing all of the sights and sounds around you.

Lab studies (<http://www.lifehack.org/377243/science-says-silence-much-more-important-our-brains-than-thought>) with mice have demonstrated that two hours a day of complete silence gives the brain an opportunity to regenerate brain cells and those brain cells become functioning neurons.

## The Future

Memory science is still in its infancy, but some surprising treatments may be on the horizon. It seems there is a relationship between type 2 diabetes and Alzheimer's (<https://www.sciencealert.com/diabetes-drug-significantly-reversed-memory-loss-in-mice-with-alzheimer-s>). A medication that's already been approved for diabetes patients has shown significant progress in reversing memory loss in mice.

# Your Brain Is Not like a Computer

Paradigm shifts may be in order. Our brains are not computers. Human brains have evolved to forget. They aren't meant to recall every detail or even every significant item.

"The purpose of memory is not to be a recording device, but a much more creative act," says Michael Bicks, *Memory Hackers* (<https://www.fastcompany.com/3056380/pbs-doc-memory-hackers-shows-the-future-of-memory-manipulation>) writer, director, and producer. "It changes the way we look at the brain." He adds: "It's built to be flexible and quickly rearrange and incorporate new information. So a lot of the things that we think are bad about memory, like forgetting things or false memories, are byproducts of the system. It's not designed to be perfect, so people shouldn't expect it to be."

## Do We Place Too Much Importance on Memory?

You probably don't want to remember everything. Throughout the world, there are about 60 known cases of people with almost complete recall (<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/feb/08/total-recall-the-people-who-never-forget>). They remember every trauma, every family argument, every slight, every failure, every loss, everything. They remember every moment of happiness, but they also remember every moment of sadness.

Most of us remember major tragedies and offenses, our brains buffer them a bit. Images might not disappear, but they begin to fade. Edges come off, details blur, all so we can go about our daily lives and experience enjoyment after pain.

While our brains are pretty amazing at deciding what information to keep and what to get rid of, perhaps they need occasional tuneups and reprioritization. One day, perhaps sooner than we think, there will be ways to reprogram our brains to get back on track.

As for your sunglasses, cellphone and keys, there is even a simpler solution. Place a bowl and charging station somewhere near the door, and don't walk in the house before putting your necessities where they belong. Use your smartphone to keep track of appointments and important dates. Why use your finite brain power for routine matters when there are more practical fixes?

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