

HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR LEARNING & MEMORY SKILLS

The following are simple, basic strategies for those who are experiencing **normal, age-related changes in memory and learning skills**. These strategies can help sharpen one's memory and learning, and help compensate for minor problems in these areas.

STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

Try to follow a basic routine. Make notes and lists that you can review as reminders. Enter all appointments on a paper or digital calendar. Use auditory reminders on your mobile devices.

Always try to put objects in their proper places when finished with them. Try to keep all of your important papers organized and in one place.

ATTENTION, PLEASE!

You can't remember something if you never learned it! It takes at least 8 seconds of intense focus to process a new piece of information and commit it to memory. Listen carefully and pay attention to what is being said. Try to concentrate on only one task at a time.

FIND A GOOD LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

When trying to learn something new, find a quiet place away from distractions such as the TV, electronic devices or the conversations of others. A comfortable room temperature and environment are essential.

USE YOUR SENSES

Use all your senses. Take time to look, listen, touch, taste and smell as appropriate.

Since we receive most new information through our eyes and ears, make sure your vision and hearing are as good as they can possibly be. Devices such as a hearing aid, a phone amplifier or a magnifying glass can help you compensate for remaining deficits.

TAKE YOUR TIME

Your memory is like a file cabinet. The older you are, the more information you have stored and the longer it may take to retrieve a specific memory or bit of information. Feeling anxious about this will further inhibit recall.

Allow yourself enough time to learn something new.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Repetition and review are essential to learning new material. Read and repeat aloud if possible. Compose a rhyme (ie. "I before E except after C") or create a mental image about the thing you are trying to learn or remember.

Practice retrieving information previously committed to memory. Just like learning a foreign language, new material is more easily forgotten if it is not periodically reviewed and used.

EXPERIENCE COUNTS

Use familiarity and expertise to learn new things. For example, your new microwave oven may have more "bells & whistles" than your old one, but it performs all of the same functions. Use your familiarity with the old oven to help you learn to operate the new one.

Also, the ability to reminisce allows us to connect new information with an old memory. When a new person's name or face reminds us of someone we knew in the past, we are more likely to remember that person.

BE SELECTIVE

There are limits to the amount of information we can learn and remember. If you try to learn or recall all the trivial and irrelevant information connected with a subject, you can overload your memory. Remind yourself that it's ok not to remember everything.

USE IT OR LOSE IT!

Memory and learning skills get rusty with disuse. Stay mentally active and challenge your skills with card or computer games, crossword puzzles or by enrolling in life-long learning courses. A website, <http://www.gamesforthebrain.com> has a variety of interactive "brain games" that can be played online.

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE FACTORS

Take care of your physical and emotional health. Eat a well-balanced diet and try to get adequate sleep. Limit alcohol and avoid unnecessary medications. Routine physical and relaxation exercises aid one's memory and learning skills. Depression and anxiety affect thinking and memory. Consult your physician or a mental health professional about these issues.

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