

Hope & Healing

Memory Improving Your Memory

A heart at peace gives life to the body — Proverbs 14:30

Introduction _____

"Anyone of any age can draw a blank," says Dr. Deborah Best. "But when you're young, you don't even notice a moment of forgetfulness. When you're older, if the exact same thing happens, you assume you're losing your grip."

It's true enough that remembering doesn't get easier as we age, but the decline usually begins when we're 25 or so. Decline, however, means that our chemical memory systems slow down. But, for many persons this doesn't mean a loss of memory or a loss of the capacity to remember. As you will see it is a matter of producing too few chemical neurotransmitters.

The good news: You can sharpen your memory. How?

Practice! Practice! Practice!

Memory's three steps:

1. Taking information in.
2. Storing information
3. Relating the new information to what we already know and recalling it when needed.

The Systems of Memory _____

Memory is not a single system. There is short and long term memory.

- **Short-term memory.** This allows us to look at a written telephone number, then turn and dial it, and then forget it.
- **Long-term memory.** You can study the telephone number and transfer it into long-term memory where it can be recalled in hours to years later.

Long-term memory is of two types. The first is implicit or taken for granted —

like driving a car or riding a bike, or a thousand other things we do unconsciously because we learned them somewhere, sometime, and stored the knowledge as a chunk or pattern into a storage place in the brain.

The other long-term memory type is explicit or indisputable, like the fact that Paris is in France.

Factors That Limit Memory _____

Storing information in chunks and patterns makes the mind remarkably flexible. With age, however, our storage places can begin to resemble shanty town as we lose the ability to produce as many neurotransmitters.

Neurotransmitters carry information between the cells of one storage space and another. As we age we can't make connections quite as fast, throwing off the delicate balance we depend on.

If we stay healthy as we age, what we call memory loss is actually a slowed response time in bringing a memory to the surface. Another fact, we can still learn new information as we age, but detailed or complicated procedures take longer to register.

Is losing neurotransmitters inevitable? No one knows for sure. At least 30% of older people have as sharp memories as 30-year-olds. Are they supernormal? Or, if you're not remembering as well as most, are you subnormal? The answer isn't known. Whatever our definitions of "normal" memory as we age, we should take special care not to damage our brains through poisoning with tobacco, alcohol, or other substances.

Chronic heart and lung disease, nutritional deficiencies through chronic dieting, and vitamin or mineral poor

blood can also slow brain function.

Other things also interfere with our ability to bring memories to life:

- Information overload.
- Chronic worry.

We have limits to our memory storage capacity at any age, but there are excellent strategies to improve our registering and recalling information.

Improving Memory _____

First, take these steps:

- Get enough sleep.
- Avoid drugs.
- Eat right.
- Reduce stress and anxiety.

Next, sharpen the way you take in information.

- **Be a sharp observer.** Look new people and things over. Take a mental snapshot of clothes, of positions within a room, of facial features. The trick is to turn your observation skills into concrete descriptions of color of eyes or shape of nose.
- **Listen to yourself.** As you meet someone new, repeat their name three times: "Hello, John." "It is John, isn't it?" "John, I'm happy to have met you."

- **Talk it out.** If working your way through a problem, read written material aloud or discuss it with someone.
- **Use feelings.** Suppose you just met Joe and you remember him because he was funny. Experiences that have some emotion are more memorable because they are so vivid.
- **Practice associations.** Say you're introduced to Mr. Sellers. As you shake hands you might see him running around the New York Stock Exchange floor, yelling "sell" as he thrusts sheafs of paper in the air. Associations can be crazy imaginations but as long as they make sense to you, that's what counts.

Other Memory Tips _____

- **Concentrate, then break.** Study in concentrated sessions of 45 minutes. Take a break. Review the old material and add new for another 45 minutes. Take another break. Review again.
- **Remember lists.** Study the list for several minutes. Go to another task. Return to the list, say it out loud. Write out the list. Review the list. Take a break. Review again. Test your memory recall of the list.
- **Mix information up.** Mix a new term, snowboarding, for example, with other terms, skiing, water skiing, rollerblading, cross referencing for the future.
- **Pattern file.** Organize information. It can be learned four times as fast as disorganized facts.
- **Review very soon.** Reflect on new information the day you learn it, mentally flashing it on the ceiling before you go to sleep. Then, use it soon and expand on it.
- **Choose what to recall.** Use:
 - Lists

- Daytimers.
- Pocket computers that beep.
- Prods, a rubber band on your wrist, to remind you to remember.

- **Be habit driven.** Put your keys in the same place. Put letters to be mailed by the front door.
- **Use mnemonic memory devices.** HOMES, for example, stands for the 5 Great Lakes: Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior.
- **Try the Greek system.** The Greeks used the rooms in their homes to remember lists, placing a single item in a separate room as they entered and went through the house. Then, at the marketplace, they visualized their homes, picking up grocery items as they mentally walked through the house.

Summary _____

Don't spend a lifetime searching for car keys. Practice these techniques and your memory will steadily get better. Then, no matter your age, you can take on any new project you wish to.

Awaken the Miracles Within You

The Miracle of Not Looking Back

Jesus said, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

He also said, "Remember Lot's wife."

The story of Lot's wife is a very telling parable. She and her family were fleeing from the threat of destruction. The angel warned them, "Don't look back." The others obey and lived. Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt, a symbol of death.

Interpretation? If you look back you stand in danger of spiritual death as well as material stagnation.

The road ahead may seem unattractive, uncertain, even dangerous. No matter, it is better than the road back.

The road ahead may mean difficulty. The road back means failure. The road ahead may be lost in the fog. Teach yourself to regard the fog as friendly.

Remember, the Lord is always at the end of the road ahead. At the end of the road back you only find yourself.

The recommendations and information in this handout are appropriate in most cases. However, for specific information concerning your personal medical condition, please, consult your doctor.