

# What you need to know about Memory and Memory Loss....



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# Memory loss with aging what's normal what's not?



This booklet is for people who have been experiencing memory difficulties, from aging, following a stroke, or who have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's or another cause of dementia. This booklet will provide you with ways to help your memory, to maintain your independence providing practical and functional tips to complete daily activities.

- Our memory is a complex function
- There is no such thing as normal memory as everyone's capacity is different
- One person may remember names, but not recognises faces and other person may remember faces and not names.
- It is **NOT a good idea** to compare your memory with someone else.

## Understanding your Memory



We have **several different types**, and we use the different types when we do different things.

- **Working Memory (Short Term)** - We use this to store information for short periods, for example remembering a conversation and following instructions.

There are different types of **Long Term Memory** they are as follows:

- **Episodic Memory-** We use this to recall past events, recent or distance. These memories often include recollections of emotions and sensations, for example remembering your wedding day.
- **Semantic Memory-** You use this to remember meanings of words and facts. If you are having difficulty with your semantic memory, you may have difficulty finding the right words when talking to someone it could be on the tip of your tongue. This is the part of our memory which also consists of general knowledge containing all facts, figures and definitions.
- **Prospective Memory-** You use your prospective memory to remember an appointment, date or event that is due to happen in the future. If you forget to meet a friend for tea or coffee, which was planned in advance, you may be having difficulties with the memory. Prospective memory is also important in remembering to take your medication.
- **Procedural Memory-** This involves activities that you learn and can then do automatically without having to think. You use this to complete a sequence of actions in a particular order, such as tying your shoelaces or dressing. You rely on it when you adopt new habit for example re-learning to walk after a stroke, and learning safety recommendations.

# How do you Remember Things?

The 4 step process of remembering something.....

We retrieve information on an unconscious level and bring it into our conscious mind at will.

## 1. Perceiving

We take in information about the environment from our 5 senses

- Sight
- Smell
- Touch
- Hearing
- Taste

## 2. Encoding

You convert this information into a form that can be stored.

The first step is holding it in short-term memory.

## 3. Storing

You transfer some of the information from short term memory into the storage of your long memory. This can take weeks/months.

## 4. Retrieving

You recall the information stored in your long term memory

**Memory problems can be caused by a breakdown at any of these stages**

### For Example:

Let's take a look at how you remember where you put your glasses. First to perceive the information we see the location we put the glasses i.e. on the kitchen table. We also register information through touch by placing them on the table. To encode this information we must pay **attention** while we set them on the kitchen table, we must be **aware** of where we are putting them. We then store this information to retrieve at a later date to recall that we put the glasses on the kitchen table.

## What is Memory Loss?

Many people worry about their memory. We all have little lapses in memory now and then, we may forget where we put our keys or we can't think of a word that is on the tip of our tongue. It is only when it becomes a **frequent occurrence** for people and when it affects their daily activities, when a problem occurs. It is a break down at any stage of the above process which can cause memory difficulties. Generally, it is not usually the fault of the entire memory system but an inefficient component of one part of your memory process. For example, if you forget where you put your glasses, there may be several reasons for this,

- You may not have registered clearly where you put them down to begin with,
- You may not have stored what you registered
- You may not be able to retrieve the memory accurately.

## What can Affect our Memory?

Memory can be affected by **several factors** including:

- Chest or urinary infection
- Depression
- Side effects of medication
- Emotional distress
- Bereavement
- Unhappiness
- Noise and other distractions
- Anxiety about illness or other issues
- Lack of restful sleep
- Vitamin deficiency or a thyroid disorder
- Overuse of alcohol

*\*Link in with your GP if you are experiencing any of the above*

## How we React to Memory Problems?

Each person reacts differently to memory loss.

- It can be very upsetting for people if memory loss becomes a frequent problem
- Some people might feel frustrated and annoyed at themselves for taking longer than before at daily tasks
- Other people may react by laughing and joking



# Tips to Maintain your Independence with Memory Difficulties

## 1. Have a Daily Routine

Although having variety and stimulation is very important for individuals with memory difficulties it can be very confusing. Therefore having a **regular routine** is one of the best memory prompts, as it helps give your day a clear structure.

## 2. Keep a Diary or Notebook

Keep a **daily diary** to keep track of your routine, things you need and want to do. It can be used to record your thoughts and ideas also.

## 3. Keep Things in the same Place

Always leave things e.g. keys, glasses, diary and wallet in the **same place** where they are easy to see.

## 4. Make a Notice Board

You can pin reminders, time-tables, ideas on the board, you could use a wipe-clean board, blackboard or wall calendar so you and your family can write down important things, it can be used as a good backup system to a diary.

## 5. Make to-do Notes

Use sticky backed post-its to remind you about what you have to do or how to do something, write out step by step instructions. Put the notes near where you need them- for example near an appliance or on the remote.

## 6. Put up Labels/Signs

Put labels up to remind you where things are in the house or to remind you to lock the door or window. Use colourful labels/signs to identify food or cutlery drawers or clothes.

## 7. Organise your medication

Ask your pharmacist about using a pill dispenser or blister pack so medication is organised, and can help you keep track of your different medication. Also set alarms to remind you when to take them.

## 8. Make checklists of important things to do before going out or before going to bed

Keep a checklist of important things to do before you go to bed or you leave the house, for example make sure you turn off the cooker or lock the door. Get into the habit of checking it every night or every time you leave the house and check it off.

## 9. Daily Newspaper

Newspapers not only keep you up to date with current affairs but can act as a reminder for the day of the week. Make sure you throw out the paper at the end of each day.

# Ways to Stay Healthy?

Maintaining healthy living may prevent progression of memory loss and can help you manage your symptoms.

## Regular Physical Activity

Exercise doesn't have to be strenuous and it should be something you enjoy for example, walking swimming gardening or dancing. It is good to participate in group activities for exercise and social interaction.

## Eat a Balanced Healthy Diet

Eat a balanced diet with loads of fruit and vegetables. Limit the amount of food you eat that contains a lot of fat, salt and sugar. Think of what is good for the heart is good for the brain. It is important to have to ensure you have a good daily intake for all the vitamins and nutrients you need. If you find yourself not cooking many meals with vegetables or meat and you are just snacking, you should consider **Meals on Wheels or Mary Grimes** catering service.

## Reduce Alcohol Intake

Drink alcohol in moderation link in with GP in case medication reacts with alcohol.

## Stop Smoking

Smoking clogs the blood vessels to the brain, by not smoking you can help keep your brain healthy free from plaques.

## Keep your Mind Active

Exercise your brain during the day to keep it simulated pick things that you enjoy, for example

- Word games/crosswords
- Join a club or volunteer in the community
- Hobbies woodwork, cooking or card games

## Be Organised

Be aware of situations that may be difficult or stressful and plan ahead find your coping strategies. Take your time and deal with things one at a time.

## Get Regular Health Checks

Have your blood pressure and cholesterol checked regularly.

## Find Time to Relax and Wind Down

Get plenty of sleep, rest and relaxation. Get to know your limits and when you need to take time out.

## Don't be Afraid to ask for Help

**Talk** to your family/friends; find coping strategies that enable your daily activities and lifestyle

## Tips to Remember Where you Put Something

- Designate special places for things you are likely to misplace e.g. your keys, wallet, pen or diary, find a way of marking this spot.
- Keep a list of where you keep things
- Label the cupboards with what you keep in them
- Keep keys on a peg board
- Do not put items in 'safe places' there too many possibilities of where they could be.
- Be organised give yourself time to locate items before you have to do or go somewhere
- When you put something down attend and concentrate to where you put the item.

### Technology:

You can also find things using beeping gadgets. A wireless lost item locator or key finder has a beeping tag that you can attach to small important items such as keys, phone or wallet. When you press the transmitter a beeping sound will come from the tag, some brands may even light up. By following the sound of the beeping you will find your misplaced item. However you need to keep the transmitter in the same place for this strategy to work.



## Tips to Remember Something you Have To Do

- Use a diary or pinboard
- Put things in a place where you will see them e.g. something you need to take with you put it near the door.
- Create a message centre, to remember to tell someone something use your pinboard for this. Put it in a room that you visit regularly.
- The message centre is a good place to put bills and letters that need attention.
- Get into a habit of writing very important down, or get someone else to write out checklists for you to follow.





## Tips to Remember People's Names

- Write down the person's name in a pocket notebook or on a card
- Include relevant information such as distinguishing features such as appearance job where the person lives
- Make an unusual link with their name and a mental image for example remembering the name Mrs Townley you could imagine a picture of her hair in a shape of a town.

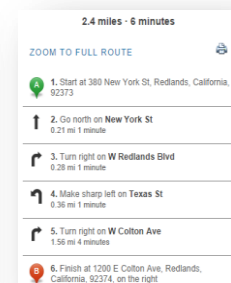
When you are in the situation that you can't remember someone's name **What Do You Do?**

1. **Do Not PANIC**
2. Go through possible names beginning with each letter in the alphabet
3. Think of the situation where you first learnt the name and anything about the situation which may trigger or link their name
4. If you still cannot remember the name do not be afraid to ask the person, you could say something like, 'I remember you very well but your name has slipped my mind'
5. You could say your name as you shake hands with the person if it is your first time meeting them.



## Tips to Remember How to Get Somewhere

- If you get easily disorientated, place names or pictures on the doors of each room in the house. Or leave the doors open, it is easier to remember what you are looking for if you can see it.
- Make a map or write out directions down- put meaningful memory joggers on the map e.g. the red post box
- Split up long directions into shorter ones
- Concentrate on one direction at a time
- If you use a smart phone use GPS and a maps APP.
- Do not be afraid to ask someone.



## Tips to Remember the Time and Date

- As mentioned before a **daily newspaper** is an easy reminder of the day and date, develop a system of discarding the old one to avoid confusion.
- Red clocks in every room are a good idea to become orientated to time

### Seasonal Changes

- In the summertime **very early in the mornings** can be very **bright**, this can cause **confusion**. If people are not aware of the time, it can cause you to get up too early in the mornings disturbing your **sleep**. Heavy curtains or black out blinds will solve this problem. A routine should be developed of opening and closing the curtains, to recognise the difference between day and night.
- Orientation boards displaying the season and weather are useful to help with dressing appropriately for the weather. These can be placed beside your bed or on your pinup memory board at your 'Message Centre'.

### Technology

- **Calendar Clocks:** which display the time, date, day of the week and month of the year will help to orientate you, position in a place that is readily seen e.g. on top of the fridge, kitchen window or television. These clocks are available in a variety of brands styles and colours they range in price from €70 to €120. (Please find list of retailers at the back of this booklet)
- **Radio Alarm Clocks:** can be set on the hour to get the time day and weather when you wake up. The radio must be tuned into an appropriate station.
- **Television:** Turning on the television to a news station or breakfast show will usually have time and date and weather forecast showing to help orientate individuals.



## Memory Tips for Maintaining Personal Hygiene

- Complete personal care tasks/showering at the **best time of day** for you whether it's in the morning or at night, when you find yourself most alert and orientated.
- **Be organised** lay out all the items you need for a bath or shower in sequence ask for assistance if required.
- Use simple **step by step** instructions and have them displayed clearly for prompting, follow the same routine daily.
- You may find you lose interest in maintaining your personal hygiene because it is a difficult task, however it is important to maintain good personal hygiene to protect your skin and overall health and wellbeing.
- Develop a **toileting pattern/routine** to avoid incontinence.
- Wear clothing with **elastic and Velcro** waistbands so clothing can be easily donned and doffed.
- Wear/Buy clothes that are machine washable and need little ironing.
- For the ladies **front fastening bras** are easier to manage, important to continue to wear a bra to avoid soreness, discomfort and skin irritation.
- **Shoes** with laces can be hard to manage. By using elastic laces may be of benefit or well-fitting slip on shoes.
- **Electric razors** are easier to use for shaving.
- Have a place to put **dirty clothes** to avoid mixing up the clean and dirty clothes.
- If you have difficulty being able to tell if you are hot or cold **several thin layers** of clothing maybe better than one thick layer.

### *Environmental Adaptations to Consider in the Bathroom*

- De-clutter the bathroom.
- Ensure there is good light, ventilation but that the room is warm.
- Put a sign on the door and keep the door open so the toilet is easily identifiable.
- Put a sign as a reminder to use toilet paper and wash your hands, make sure toilet paper and soap are in a place which is in clear view.
- To prevent falls remove the toilet roll holder in case it is used for support consider installing a grab rail or ask your OT to assess for toilet frame or raised toilet seat.
- Remove the lock from the door.
- Remove loose mats.
- Consider removing inward opening door to concertina door that can be opened from the outside.
- Colour the water in the toilet bowl to assist aim for men adding food colouring to toilet water or coloured toilet cleaner tablets which you place in cistern.
- Remove all cleaning products for safety.
- **Magiplug** prevents baths and sinks from overflowing, releasing water when a certain water pressure is reached. Also changes colour when temperature rises. Costs approximately €10.
- Consider night light in hallways to guide the person to the toilet.



## Communication and Safety Tips

- Have your hearing and eyesight checked regularly.
- Try to avoid talking in a noisy environment with too many distractions.
- Let the person know if you are having difficulty understanding or following them, repeat what you think they said back to them.
- Ask the person to slow down or speak clearly to enable you to understand.
- Know your limits as stress and tiredness can make it more difficult to communicate. Take a rest or ask for help if you need to. When you are planning social events make sure you give yourself extra rest time beforehand.
- Carry appropriate **identification** at all times including your name, address and an emergency contact number. You could use an identity bracelet or necklace.
- **Pendant alarms** are recommended to wear in case of emergency if you are at risk of falls, ask your OT for more information where to source pendant alarms.
- **Telephones** with a set of large numbers or large auto dial buttons with individual's photos or names are easy to use as you do not need to remember the number just the person.
- **Mobile Phones** have many advantages over landlines you can keep it your pocket. You can have a contact list and when a person's calls their name and picture show on the display screen. On some mobiles you can use voice activation to for dialling numbers automatically.
- Stress and illness can make it more difficult to communicate therefore it is important to carry information on your medical condition, a list of medication and allergies in your wallet in case of emergency.
- **Sensors** that monitor smoke, gas flooding and intruders can be very useful to reduce risks of accidents or damages occurring.
  - Ensure you get boilers serviced regularly
  - You can use timers for heaters and electric fires
- Avoid using electric blankets, particularly if you are at risk of becoming incontinence during the night. If you want to use an electric blanket use a timer to ensure it turns off.



# Using Public Transport

- Having memory difficulties, is not itself a sufficient reason to prevent someone from driving.

What matters from both a legal and a practical point is if you are still able to **drive safely**. Even though for experienced drivers driving is an automatic activity, it is a very **complex task** that requires quick thought processes and manual skills.

For example, you have to have the ability to.....

- Make sense of and respond to everything you see.
- Follow and react to actions of other road users.
- Remember where you are going and how you get there.
- Follow directions.



You are recommended to discuss your ability to drive with your Consultant and Occupational Therapist. Some people require on road assessment prior to being re-insured and deemed safe to drive independently.

It is important to plan ahead, to find other means of transport and ways of getting places, for when the time comes that you will not be able to drive.

Here are a few tips to plan using **public transport** routes....

- Firstly find out what public transport services are available in your area. You can find this out by researching on the internet, ask your family to assist you with using the internet or get in contact with you local county council.
- If you are good at reading maps carry a map while travelling or use MAPS on a smart phone. If maps are not helpful to you use clearly written step by step directions.
- Take the same route to places you visit regularly and if being driven by someone else ask them to take the route you are familiar with. By making a route a habit it will help you remember it for longer.
- Using a map can be difficult if you **cannot orientate** yourself to your own location, therefore it is important always to carry a mobile phone with full battery and call a family member or friend to help you get home.
- There are also GPS locators available such as specialised in-soles which track where you are and could sync with your carers phone or GPS watches with built in phones.
- If you do get lost **DO NOT PANIC** ask someone for help and directions to the nearest public landmark that you would be familiar with or GARDA station.

## Maintaining Activities

It is important to keep in touch with friends and family, because you are experiencing memory difficulties does not mean you have to give up everything. You should continue to do things you always did but you may need to **adapt** them in some way. It is important to **participate** in meaningful activities that you enjoy to improve and **maintain** your quality of life.

It can be difficult to maintain concentration for a long period of time so enjoy an activity for a short period is often more satisfactory.

Simple activities are often the best.  
Too much choice can be bewildering.

Look for opportunities to have a good laugh, having memory difficulties does not mean you have to lose your sense of humour.

### Suggestions for Activities:

#### **Music**

Listening to music can remain a pleasure for a long time. Playing favourite pieces or playing older songs can help to reminisces for past events.

#### **Pets**

Cats and Dogs can have positive influence for many people with memory difficulties; they can give people a role and sense of purpose. They can also relax individuals particularly when petting or stroking them.

#### **Art**

Painting a picture or looking at old photography can help people express their feelings and can be good trigger to start a conversation.

#### **Television**

Television can become difficult to follow and can cause confusion. If you do enjoy watching TV choose something that is simple to follow and interesting.

## Cooking

Planning to cook a hot meal is a complex task. It can take a lot of effort and concentration to cook a meal. Therefore many people **avoid** cooking or may also forget to eat and drink. It is important to have a balanced diet to maintain your health and wellbeing.

Here are a few tips to consider when cooking a meal:

- **Set an alarm** or get a friend /loved one to call you to remind you about mealtimes.
- Cook foods that are familiar to you.
- Avoid using plates with patterns.
- Attend to **one task at a time** and avoid external distraction. **Simplify** your recipe and remember them one by one.
- Write out your recipe in a special book or use a set of index cards, picture diagrams and instructions can be beneficial also.
- It is a good idea to **lamine recipe sheets** as they may become worn and dirty easily in the kitchen environment.
- Ensure **smoke and gas alarms** are working effectively.
- Make sure items in daily use are within easy reach and using labels to identify where items are and what they are.
- It takes a lot of concentration to attend to different appliance for explain the oven hob and microwave at once therefore try cooking meals that requires you to use just **one appliance**.
- Reduce the number of steps involved in cooking by buying for example pre-cut vegetables
- It is a good idea to have a weekly or fortnightly **meal plan/routine** to ensure you are getting a balanced diet.
- Try a whistle on a kettle with an automatic cut off switch, also cordless kettles are safer.
- When an appliance needs to be replaced buy the same brand and model if at all possible to help the person retain their skill.
- For days you do not feel like cooking there are a couple of homemade meal delivery services in the local area for example Mary Grimes and Meals on Wheels. Frozen meals are handy also on occasion, which you heat in the microwave.

Poor appetite may be attributed an acute illness or depression and people do not seem interested in food, please liaise with your **GP** if you suspect this.

Poor appetite may also be influenced by badly fitting dentures causing sore gums and eating uncomfortable check with your **dentist**.



## Finance Management

- Now is the time to become organised with your money and finances. You may consider setting up a joint account with a loved one, it is a good idea to involve someone you trust, show them your system and where to get your account information.
- It is a good idea to set up direct debits to pay regular bills such as electricity, gas and telephone. You will not need to worry out paying these bills or having the service cut off. However you will need to make sure there is enough money in your account to pay these bills.
- Put your bills in one location maybe at your message board as a reminder to pay them. **Be organised** not to put added stress on yourself. *Do not panic* if you forget to pay a bill. In case an event such as this occurs, If possible try having a small sum of savings, a rainy day fund.
- Ask for assistance from a loved one when needed.
- If you don't have these automatic payment methods set up, it is recommended to arrange a meeting in the bank to organise the same.
- It is recommended to use only one purse or wallet as it is easy to get confused if you have several different ones. Use a wallet with two note compartments and a coin compartment to separate receipts and notes making cash easier to find.
- Using a **debit card** reduces the need to have cash in different places. However change your pin to a familiar number you will remember. It is not advised to carry your pin with you but share it with someone you trust.
- Money and Finances often bring legal issues such as making a Will and having an Enduring Power of Attorney. Make an appointment with or solicitor regards organisation of this or get more information from the Citizen Information.



Use a Debit Card



Do not stress



# Household Chores

## Shopping

- Some people always shop with a list. However, others leave it to memory, as they walk around the shop. If you have never used a list while shopping it would be a good idea to start getting into a habit of using one, each time you go to the shop. If you do not want to write one down use a voice recorder and replay it.
- Keep your list at the Message Centre or on your Memory Board.
- If you use the internet you could also shop online and you can save your shopping lists and see what you bought the last time, this may trigger what you need this time



## Cleaning

- Use your diary to write down where you complete what household and chores and to remind you what still needs to be completed.
- Develop a regular routine and weekly plan such as cleaning the bathroom on a Friday or washing up after meals so things become a habit.
- A checklist of tasks can also serve as a reminder.



## Medication Management

It is easy to forget to take tablets. Trying to remember what you are to take, how many to take or when you take them, can be over-whelming and confusing for many people even if they are not experiencing memory difficulties. It is important to discuss your medication regime with your pharmacist and set up a system that works for you.

### Things to discuss:

- The supply of all your prescriptions at one time, then write in your diary when you are to collect them.
- Ask if they can simplify the number and frequency of tablets you need to take.
- Ask your pharmacist for a list of what each tablet is for and the side effects.

**Note:** It is a good idea to involve a family member in this discussion so they can understand the medication you are taking and the reason why you are taking them.

### Taking the Right Tablets

The easiest way to ensure this is to get your tablets in a **blister pack** from the pharmacy. There is a compartment for each day of the week and time tablets should be taken.

### But how do you remember when to take them?

Use a blister pack with an electronic prompter, e.g. set an alarm on your phone or watch or alarm clock.

### However, if you like to organise your own tablets....

You can purchase weekly or daily tablet containers which have different compartments for morning midday evening and bedtime. It is recommended you would organise your tablets with a family member or friend present.

### Technology

There have been many devices developed in recent years to assist with medication management. For example:

- The Careousel computerised medical dispenser that signals an alarm and the cassette rotates to expose correct tablets.
- The Cadex Watch is a wrist watch that vibrates or sounds alarm however you will need to be able to associate the sound with taking your tablets.
- The Tabtime 4 is another style of medication prompter with 4 compartments, that's a capacity of almost 100 tablets per day, it has twin alarms, a flashing red LED and an audio alarm.



**Ensuring to take your Medication in the right dosage and times is vital to your health and well-being, therefore if you were not to use any of the other memory tips you would be highly recommended to consider the ones listed above.**

# Assistive Technology

Throughout the booklet different devices have recommended, however you need to consider the following when deciding to use high tech assistive devices such as....

- Location of the aid is very important, where is the item purposeful?
- Where will the user see the item and pay attention to it? Mantel piece? Bedside Locker?
- Does the item need a power source? Will the switch remain on?
- Does the item need batteries? Who will replace these batteries and monitor same?
- Can the user recognise the symbols on the aid, i.e. digital or analogue clock face?
- Can the person hear the aid's prompt or alarm?

## Where can these devices be purchased?

### Orientation Devices

- [www.clairmontplc.com](http://www.clairmontplc.com)
- [www.argos.ie](http://www.argos.ie)
- [www.day-clock.com](http://www.day-clock.com)
- [www.dayclox.com](http://www.dayclox.com)
- [www.forget-me-not.no](http://www.forget-me-not.no)
- [www.graysonclocks.com](http://www.graysonclocks.com)



### Locator Devices

- [www.loc8tor.com/uk](http://www.loc8tor.com/uk)
- [www.smart-finder.co.uk](http://www.smart-finder.co.uk)



### Medication Reminder Devices

- [www.tabtime.com](http://www.tabtime.com)
- [www.pivotell.co.uk](http://www.pivotell.co.uk)



### Other Useful Links to Retailers for Assistive Technology

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| • <a href="http://www.designability.org.uk">www.designability.org.uk</a> | • <a href="http://www.activemobility.co.uk">www.activemobility.co.uk</a> |
| • <a href="http://www.talkingproducts.com">www.talkingproducts.com</a>   | • <a href="http://www.alzproducts.co.uk">www.alzproducts.co.uk</a>       |
| • <a href="http://www.pivotell.co.uk">www.pivotell.co.uk</a>             | • <a href="http://www.designability.org.uk">www.designability.org.uk</a> |
| • <a href="http://www.alroni.com">www.alroni.com</a>                     | • <a href="http://www.ncbi.ie">www.ncbi.ie</a>                           |

## NOTES:

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.