

STATIC IN THE ATTIC

WAYS TO ENHANCE MEMORY & LEAD A BRAIN WELLNESS LIFESTYLE

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Do you ever feel frustrated because you can't find your keys? Have you ever removed your nine-iron from your golf bag and now, for the life of you, can't find where you put the darn club? Have you ever been chatting with a friend or colleague as you walk down the fairway, and suddenly, in the middle of the conversation your mind goes blank and you can't remember what you were about to say? Have you ever seen a friend on the course or in the clubhouse (someone you've known for a long time), but could not recall his or her name?

If you answered "yes" to any of the above, you have plenty of company. All of the examples above can be considered normal memory experiences as people age. While the frequency of word grope, senior moments, and tip-of-the-tongue syndrome increases as we age, it is not necessarily a sign of decline or the signal of impending Alzheimer's disease.

There are certain memory changes that are temporary and reversible. Memory is actually a complex system of processes, and there are many variables that can impact any part of the memory chain. Some reversible causes of memory problems include: sleep deprivation, stress, multi-tasking, infection, dehydration, vitamin deficiency, depression, colds/flu, sensitivity to medication, strong emotions (e.g. anger, happiness, grief).

How do you know if memory problems are part of normal aging or if they signify the onset of more serious problems such as Alzheimer's disease or cardiovascular disease? The answer comes down to frequency and severity of memory problems. Everyone has forgetful episodes from time to time, but if you have a sense of concern you should consult your physician for a complete medical evaluation.

In case you didn't know, memory can actually get better as we age. However, it requires training, just like an athlete who challenges the body on a regular basis through exercise. Brain exercise should be incorporated into everyone's life on a regular basis. The 1990s marked a period of advancements in brain research driven by new technology such as the PET (positron emission tomography) Scan and the fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imagery). Researchers found that the brain is like one big muscle. As with any other muscle you have to use it, or you can lose it.

Mental exercise is just as crucial to well-being as physical exercise. Bad memory has been linked to heart disease, diabetes and even a high-fat diet. Brain protective mental and physical steps may even influence who gets Alzheimer's disease. So if you want to "stay sharp" you have to do some sort of "neurobics" in addition to aerobics. Up until just a few years ago, scientists thought that by the time a person reached age 5, the brain was wired for the rest of someone's life. Not true. The great news is, scientists now know that the brain

is constantly rewiring itself, adapting, and growing new brain cells—even throughout the aging process. Not only can a person grow new brain cells, but the more people exercise and challenge the brain, the less likely they will be to develop brain damaging disease later in life.

Medical advances have made it possible for us to have a much longer life span. We all know we should eat a healthy & balanced diet, exercise regularly, and control our stress. But now, there is another factor to consider...brain exercise. It's not only about formal educational pursuits, but about stimulating the brain to grow new connections and there are a variety of ways to achieve this. Strive to do something that stimulates your mind at least 3-5 times per week. Golf is an excellent activity. You may want to start by hitting a bucket of balls one day, a golf lesson another day, or simply take the time to tee it up, even if it's just for a few holes (whatever your schedule permits). The key words are: Have fun and keep active!

TIPS FOR A BETTER MEMORY

- If you want to remember, slow down and pay attention to what you want to remember. The number one cause of memory problems is lack of focus.
- Say out loud what you want to remember. Don't worry about people thinking you are strange for talking to yourself. Saying something out loud fires more brain cells and helps in the memory process.
- Get 30 minutes of physical exercise at least 5 days a week. This helps promote circulation to the brain and will benefit your heart as well.
- Follow a balanced, portion-controlled diet. Make sure to drink sufficient amounts of water each day.
- Get sufficient amounts of Omega-3 fatty acids. Your brain is approximately 60% fat and 40% water; fuel it with the right kind of fat. The easiest way to accomplish this is to eat fish 3 times per week.
- Lighten up, everyone forgets from time to time. Accept the fact, that you cannot remember everything in this highly complex and fast-paced world.
- Use visualization techniques as a tool. The more creative the visualization, the higher the likelihood that you will remember.
- To remember pass codes, license plate numbers, credit card numbers, telephone numbers, and/or important dates, "create a story" that links the individual letters or numbers together.

Dr. Alice Jacobs is director of Brain Gain™, a company that provides memory training and brain wellness workshops for groups and individuals. She may be contacted at www.braingain.info.