

Guidance for memory difficulties

Key points:

- There is no one simple cure for memory difficulties but there are ways of coping with the problems and making life easier.
- Using strategies and external aids to help with memory is not 'cheating' – it is important to make use of anything that will help.
- These kinds of approaches can help with the emotional and practical consequences of supporting someone with memory difficulties.

How to make life easier:

- Adapting the environment.
- Using external memory aids.
- Following set routines.
- Combining several strategies to make a substitute 'memory system'.
- Improving general well being.

Adapting the environment

By adapting the environment you will have less need to rely on your memory. The environment constitutes as the location, e.g. home and the people in it, e.g. you.

- Keep your calendar up to date and to check it regularly.
- Have a place for key items in the home and ensure items are put back in their place so you can find them next time.
- Use of post-it notes e.g. at the front door to remind you if you need to do anything before you go out or need to take anything with you.

Using external memory aids

There is nothing special about using memory aids, most of us use them. They are important for you as they can take over some of the tasks your memory would otherwise perform, and help limit the number of things you have to remember.

You might like to consider the following memory aids that may suit you:

- Using your mobile phone to record and remind you of appointments.
- Using a notepad to record messages and things you wish to remember.
- Take responsibility for completing a wall calendar to prompt communication with family and forward planning.
- Post-it notes as visual reminders.
- Support from your family.

It is not intended that your family 'nag' you but you may benefit from being prompted to check the calendar each morning and a short dialogue about your day ahead. You should be responsible for keeping it updated, but your family may need to remind you to keep it up to date. [If you can get into a regular routine you will know what to expect which will minimise the demands on your memory and limit any irritability.](#)

You will benefit from more time to process information. So ask others to be clear and to the point to reduce the amount of information that has to be remembered, [just concentrating on the essentials.](#)

Your memory difficulties mean that it is likely that you will not learn by your mistakes. If you make a mistake when learning it is likely that you will repeat the mistake the next time round as the wrong response/action tends to get in the way making it harder for you to learn. To stop this happening it is a good idea for others to prevent you from making mistakes when learning new information or a new skill. This approach is known as 'errorless learning'. [An advantage of the errorless learning approach is that it will give you the opportunity to experience success which is a great motivator.](#)

Encourage others not to provide you with the answer immediately when you are trying to remember something. Start by asking for a cue or a prompt which will help you to retrieve the information. For example ask for the first letter of a name to help you remember the whole name or if you are looking for something think of where you were last time you had it. If you are unable to remember ask which room you should look in and look around. This strategy will help you to be more independent.

Using internal memory strategies

Internal strategies are things that you can do inside your head to try to remember things. A relatively straightforward combination of 2 or 3 strategies can cover the areas where there might otherwise be difficulties, and provide a safety net for things that really must be remembered.

- **Chunking** – sometimes referred to as ‘chaining’. This involves breaking a task down in to smaller steps and learning one step at a time. Learn step one then step two. Then go through steps one and two before learning step three. Then add this to steps one and two and so on.
- **Context – Event-** based tasks are known to be easier to remember than time-based tasks. If something has to be done at a certain time you need to think about where you will be /what you will be doing at that time – building up a mental image of the context may make it easier to remember when the situation presents itself. If this does not work for you, the reverse may be necessary – turn the event-based task in to a time-based task e.g. use of mobile phone alarm as a prompt.
- **Attention/Checking information** – Sometimes forgetfulness may be due to the fact that you are not paying attention. Be confident asking people to speak at a slower pace and/or repeat key words and phrase and/or asking how they spell their name. This will ensure you pay closer attention to their response. This in turn means the name is encoded at a deeper level.

Improving wellbeing

Memory is a very important part of our sense of who we are. Our personal store of experience and knowledge helps define our identity and determine how we react. Our memory contains knowledge about other people, which is essential to help us function in social situations, and we draw on our memory to gauge how competent and confident we feel in different settings. So it is no surprise that memory difficulties often have major emotional consequences, including feelings of loss and anger, and increased levels of anxiety.

This can mean that you are experiencing a sense of loss that is not just the result of emotional changes but practical losses too:

- Loss of structure.
- Loss of regular valued activities.

It is helpful to share these feelings with others so they can understand how you are feeling. If you would feel more comfortable talking to a professional, your GP can refer you to Time To Talk which offers up to 6 weeks counselling/talking therapy via telephone or face to face.

Please ask any member of the team caring for you if you need help understanding this leaflet, or if you need the information provided in an alternative format. This includes translations, large print, Braille, easy read, on audio tape, or via email.