

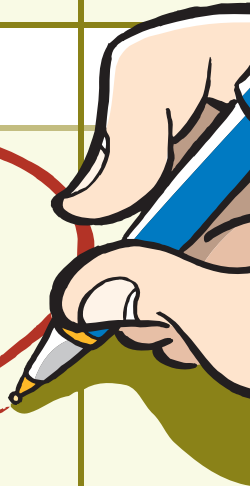
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Improve Your Memory

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Tips and Hints
for Seniors



INSTITUT UNIVERSITAIRE DE GÉRIATRIE DE MONTRÉAL

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Are you 60, 70, or 85 years old? Is your memory playing tricks on you and getting you worried?

No need to panic! It's likely just the effects of aging. Like your body, your memory changes with the years.

Normal aging (when you're in good health) does not lead to general loss of memory.

You easily remember things that happened long ago, but have a little more difficulty retaining new things. Plus, you have a harder time remembering the contents of a book or lecture. You recognize someone on the street and can remember all kinds of details about that person, but just can't remember their name!

This is all part of normal aging and does not prevent you from living independently. However, these little memory lapses can cause certain frustration. Here are a few suggestions to help minimize them.

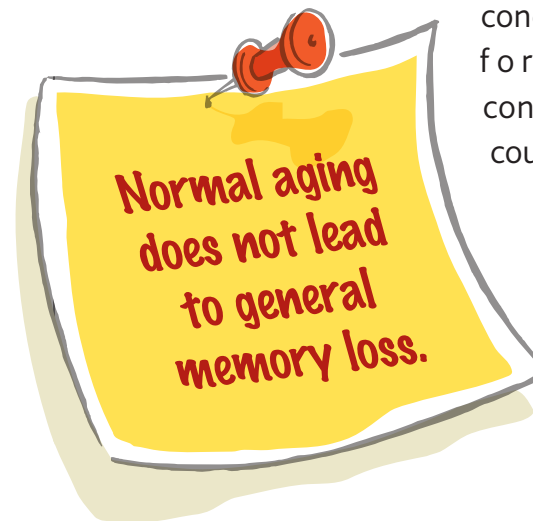
Don't bury your head in the sand

Accepting that your memory isn't perfect is a good start. Better still, having a good idea of what you tend to forget should help you to find an effective solution. Instead of focusing on trivial lapses of memory, invest your time in finding ways to minimize them.

Pay attention...

As you age, you are more easily distracted. "Multitasking" is not quite as easy as it used to be. You need to make an effort and consciously tell yourself to pay attention in order to remember information.

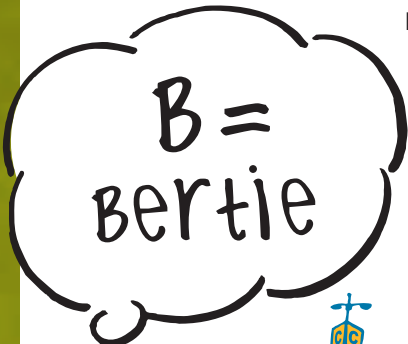
You'll retain more of what you read if you do so in a quiet environment. Plus, you should limit situations where you are doing two things at once, especially when one of them requires concentration. Preparing dinner for guests and having a conversation at the same time could lead to disaster!



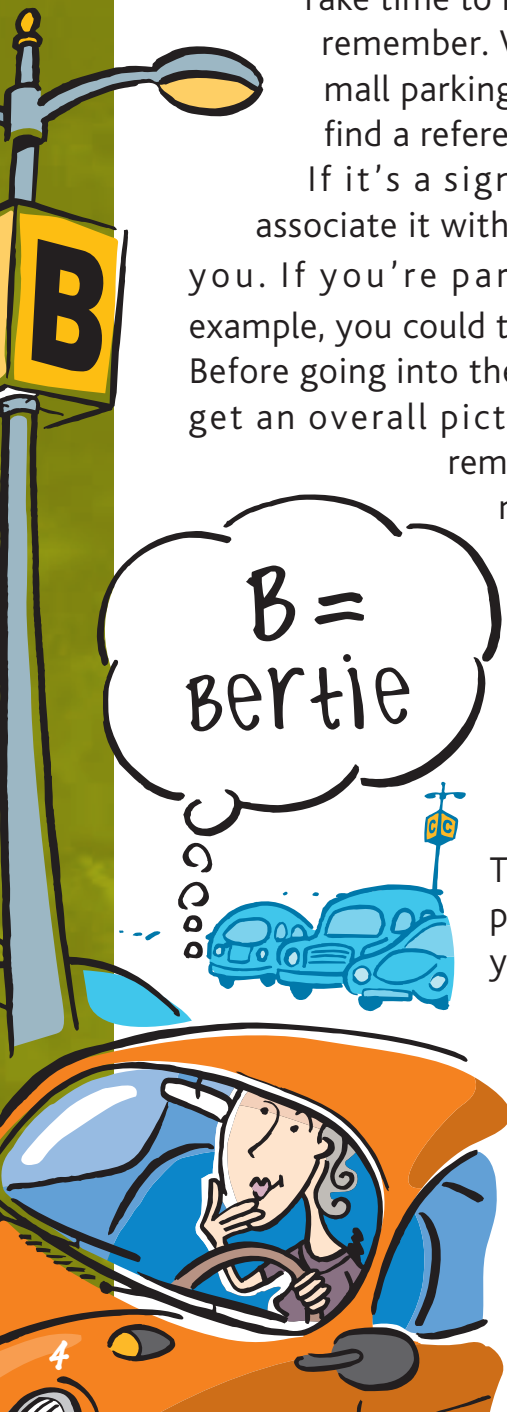
Take time...

Take time to read information you want to remember. When you leave your car in a mall parking lot, take a minute or two to find a reference point to serve as a guide.

If it's a sign with a letter or number, associate it with something that's familiar to you. If you're parked in section « **B** », for example, you could think of **B**ertie, your husband. Before going into the mall, take a few seconds to get an overall picture of the parking lot and remember the association you've made. This step will save time in finding your car when you leave.



B =
Bertie



Taking time also means asking people to repeat information you haven't quite grasped, immediately writing down information you think is important, and accepting signs of impatience from others.

Are you learning Spanish or how to use the Internet? When you do exercises at home or reread your notes, do it in short intervals. You'll remember more of what you're learning if you plan on four 15 minute sessions rather than a solid hour.

Create links

Creating links between what you already know and new information increases your chances of remembering it later. Your new neighbor is named Steve, just like your nephew. This simple association will help you remember. If you attend a lecture on a topic you know something about, you will make more links and retain more of the presentation.

Want to increase your chances of remembering the contents of an article? Begin by reading the summary to get a general idea of what it's about. The summary will help you understand what's coming up and encourage you to organize the material to be retained. Then, read the article once through, noting down the general idea of each section. Afterwards, ask yourself questions based on the ideas you wrote down, then answer them, taking care to add details from each section. Finally, try to answer these same questions from memory. You'll see, it's very effective!

Similarly, organizing information you want to remember increases your chances of recalling it when needed. To remember which groceries you need, it's better to group them by category (dairy, produce, etc.). That way, you're less likely to forget something. Once you're at the store, seeing the various departments will help you remember what you need.

Test your memory

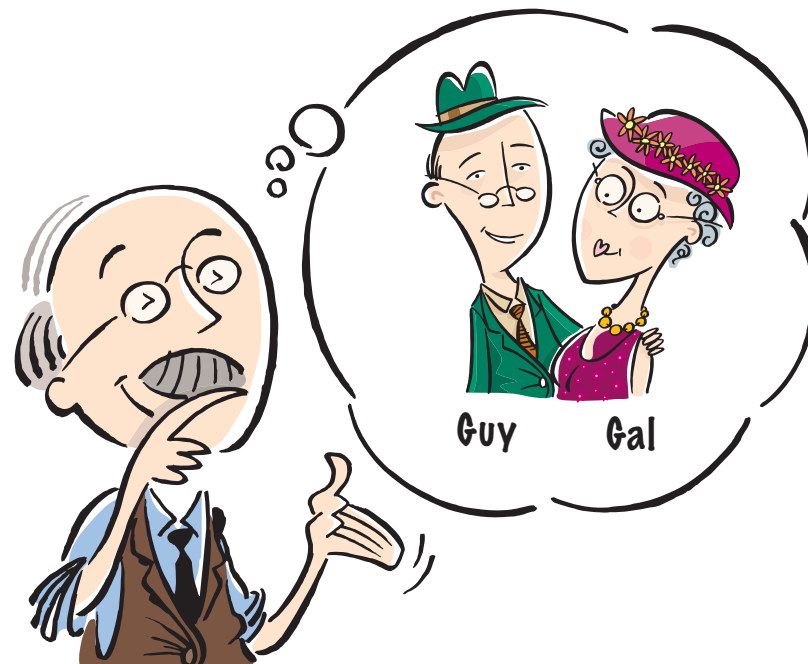
An easy way to retain new information is to think of it again over and over and for increasing intervals.

To learn a new phone number, write it down. Then, try to dial it immediately from memory and check to see if you're right. Repeat this exercise a few seconds later, a few minutes later, and so on. After three or four times, the number is very likely to instantly come to mind when you want to call that person! You will definitely learn it more quickly this way than if you look in your address book each time. You can also apply this method to names.

Visualize images

Another way to remember new information is to associate it with an image in your mind. For example, you wish to remember a great little wine you've discovered by a producer called "Guigal." First of all, break the name up into syllables. Then, picture each one as an image: a GUY (gui) and a GAL. Finally, link these two images in a single picture. You could imagine a couple walking arm in arm. Doing this exercise will help you remember the name. All you have to do is recall the picture whenever you want to remember it!

Because some people are auditory rather than visual, this tip may be less helpful to them. Try it and see for yourself!

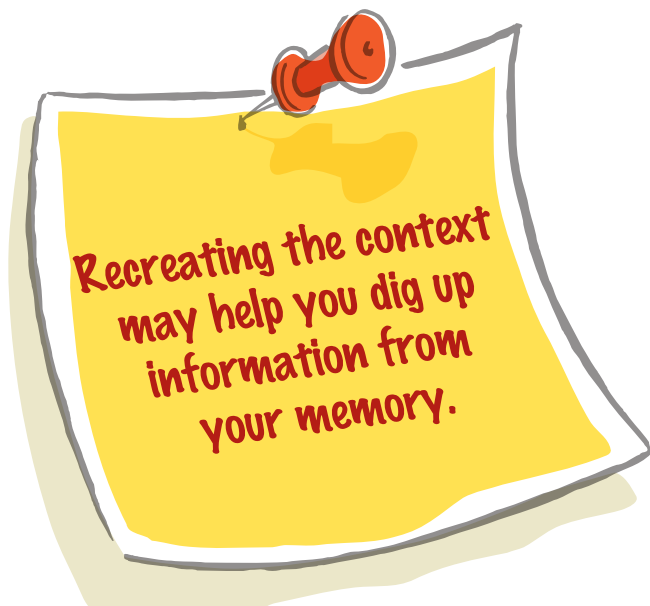


The joys of routine...

You hate routine? Sometimes routine can make life easier. You'll find that creating new habits will quickly make memory lapses a thing of the past. For example, you could water your plants the day you watch your favorite nighttime soap or associate taking medication with an activity you do at the same or around the same time every day.

Remember what you know

You can't remember where you put the scissors. Try to remember what you used them for the last time. Which room were you in? Was it morning or night? Did you use them for sewing or to open a package? Recreating the context may help you dig up information from your memory.



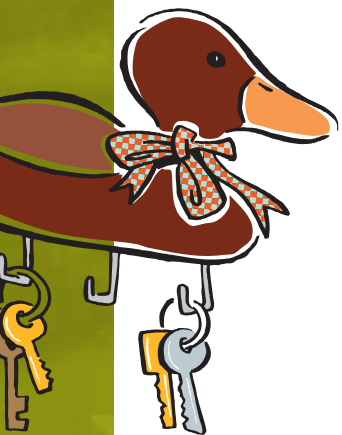
Take advantage of memory aids

An agenda is great, but it may not be enough. Are your entries sometimes incomplete? Do you, for example, sometimes forget to note where particular appointments are? Even worse, do you ever wonder what certain entries mean?

If you answered yes to these questions, you may not be getting the most out of your agenda. Using it in this manner minimizes its usefulness. The way you make entries is crucial!

Tips on organizing your agenda effectively

- ✓ Choose a small agenda you can carry with you.
- ✓ Opt for an agenda that divides days into three sections (morning, afternoon, evening).
- ✓ Personalize your agenda by adding sections or affixing memos inside.
- ✓ Organize useful information into groups, such as phone numbers, errands to be done, important personal information, bills to be paid, etc. That way, you'll always have it with you.
- ✓ Develop the habit of regularly consulting your agenda, in the morning and at night, for example.



Other memory aids

- Choose a special place to keep your keys, glasses, wallet, and other small objects.
- A memo board placed in a strategic location (near the kitchen and phone) will allow you to write down calls you need to make and groceries you need to buy.
- Making notes on your calendar is very useful as long as you make use of them!

Memory aids are tools that should make life easier, because they help to better organize your daily routine. Choose the one that best suits your lifestyle.

Recognize the friends and enemies of memory

Regular physical exercise increases the flow of oxygen to the brain and has a positive effect on memory. A balanced diet and relaxation are also essential to good memory. Remaining intellectually active, having projects on the go, meeting people, getting involved in your community, and feeling useful all help keep your memory in good working order.

However, lack of sleep, alcohol, certain medications, depression, and stress have negative effects on memory. Be able to identify in which circumstances your memory fails and ask yourself whether one of these culprits is the cause.

In short, remember that you don't lose your memory as you age, it just gets a little more temperamental. If you have frequent or long memory lapses, feel free to talk to your doctor.



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