

PRESCRIPTION FOR A HEALTHY BRAIN

Busy midlife adults who care for older relatives and look after the needs of their own families while holding down full-time jobs often find themselves experiencing short-term memory lapses. They can't remember where they parked the car at the mall, what they did with the car keys, why they forgot to pay last month's electric bill, and who was the nice man who said "Hi" at the supermarket?

At the same time many middle-aged individuals discover that they have almost total recall for situations, people and events from the past. They can recite the names of everyone in their high school homeroom, know all the words to songs that were popular decades ago, and recall batting averages of their favorite baseball players who have long since retired.

CAUSES OF MEMORY MALFUNCTION

Families of older adults who experience memory lapses often worry that these might be early signs of Alzheimer's disease or another memory disorder. People with a family history of these illnesses become even more concerned about their own memory health as they grow older.

If you are among these anxious individuals – relax! Memory lapses are common in middle-aged and older adults are a normal part of the aging process. Most people are able to maintain healthy memories well into later life.

However certain age-related conditions may have a negative affect on memory performance. The good news it that they can be treated effectively with medications lifestyle changes or a combination of the two:

- High blood pressure
- Decreased thyroid levels
- Low blood sugar levels affect thought processes and memory temporarily. They can be treated immediately with sugar and prevented with careful monitoring of blood sugar levels.
- Antidepressants, antihistamines, certain pain relievers, sleep medications and other medicines may affect memory. Talk to your doctor about potential memory side effects before taking them.

21 WAYS TO ENERGIZE YOUR MEMORY

There are a variety of techniques and strategies caregivers of older adults (and older people themselves) can use to maintain and even improve middle-aged memories. Because they don't involve medicines that may have side effects that could actually make you feel worse, these memory boosters are mentally challenging and often fun.

1. Decrease stress. Clear your mind and sit quietly for five minutes.
2. Work into each day 20 minutes of physical activity that gets your heart pumping and your brain energized.
3. If you need to remember something – the name of your child's teacher, doctor's appointments, a friend's address -- write it down.
4. Turn off the TV. Instead play video games with your kids or grandchildren
5. Read a book
6. Energize your diet with brain foods rich in Vitamin B6, B12 and folic acid – which can found in spinach, broccoli, strawberries, beans, melons sweet potatoes, tomatoes, green tea, berries, citrus fruits and other fruits and vegetables
7. Keep a daily journal to record your thoughts, feelings, ideas, and emotions
8. Get a good night's sleep – at least eight hours
9. Solve the daily crossword puzzle
10. Build a network of new friends
11. Walk your dog – or borrow a dog to walk if you don't have one of your own
12. Memorize a poem
13. Learn to manage stress
14. Stop smoking; limit alcoholic drinks
15. Turn off the TV and listen to music
16. Make it a point to connect names with faces when meeting someone new.
17. Take a night school class
18. Talk to kids – your own or the neighbor's children
19. Talk to older people – your own older relatives, elderly neighbors or nursing home residents
20. Play video games with your kids
21. Write a letter to a friend instead of emailing a message or making a phone call.

A PREVIEW OF AGING FOR CAREGIVERS

A less-than-perfect memory is a small reminder that you too are aging – just like your older father or mother. Facing up to this fact can help you better appreciate your parent's own aging experience and help you provide him or her with kind, considerate, and thoughtful care. You'll also learn how to care for your own aging self as you reach later life. [667/2-10]