



How to Improve Your . . . “Whatcha’ call it?”

Many older people worry about becoming forgetful. In the past, memory loss and confusion were considered a typical part of aging. But now scientists know most people remain alert and able as they age, although it may take a little longer to remember things -- normal memory lapses.

Memory lapses can be due to many causes, and are often curable. Feeling sad, lonely, worried or bored -- or changes such as retirement or loss of a spouse -- can leave some people feeling confused or forgetful. Prescription or over-the-counter medications can also affect memory, as can nutrition, lack of exercise and even the need of a good night’s sleep.

People concerned about memory problems should see their doctor, who can perform a thorough examination for memory loss. If dementia is not present, or the causes are reversible, then you may simply need to use your memory more efficiently. Two of the most effective techniques for remembering are *association* and *visualization*.

Association means connecting a new piece of information to one already in your memory. For example, if you want to remember your dentist appointment is at 2 p.m., imagine the dentist’s office in your mind. You know that it is on the second floor. Second floor, 2 p.m.-- association.

Sometimes you have to work a little harder at linking things together. Be creative! If you want to remember that the community swimming pool is on Maple Street, imagine the pool is filled with maple syrup.

What if you can’t think of an association? Use visualization.

Visualization means forming pictures in your mind, and is a tried-and-true method for improving memory.

Let's say you're planting a garden and want to remember that tomatoes and carrots grow well near each other. Create a mental picture of Bugs Bunny with a carrot in one hand and a tomato in the other. Or practicing memorizing lists of four or five grocery items you want to purchase. If your list consists of milk, cheese, grapefruit, canned tuna, and doughnuts, think "round." Picture four round life preservers that look like a round cheese, a grapefruit, a round can of tuna and a doughnut, floating in an ocean of milk.

One memory challenge shared by people of all ages is meeting new people and remembering their names. There are several methods you can put together to become an expert at remembering names. First, when you hear a person's name for the first time, repeat it back to them. Then:

1. If it is an unusual name, ask about it. Is it a family name? How is it spelled? Discussing the name in more depth will help you remember it.
2. If it is a common name, like Bill or Mary, visualize the name floating in the air above the person's head. Or think up a silly rhyme that ties the name to their appearance or job, like Bill counts pills (he's a pharmacist) or Hairy Mary (who wears a bouffant hairstyle).
3. Share your intent to practice memorizing names and make a game of it with others. Have a contest!

If you practice memory techniques, you will find which ones work best for you. Be confident, keep trying and you may improve your memory so much you'll surprise yourself!

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