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It's normal to forget



Being a little forgetful is expected as we age. By the time we hit mid-30s, our memories begin to fade and continue to do so as the years pass. This is normal. The human brain works slower in old age because more information is stored over time.

A recent study revealed that when a computer is downloaded with all the words and learning a person might encounter in a lifetime, its performance slows, similar to an older adult's performance on cognitive tests. The program slowed because the database grew, taking longer to search the database, not because its ability to process had declined. When a computer was programmed to simulate the performance of young adults, the results were faster because of the smaller database.

Experts say as we grow older, we can expect the following memory lapses;

1. Forgetting names of those we see infrequently or the name of someone we are familiar with if we see them in unfamiliar surroundings.
2. Forgetting details of a recent conversation.
3. Repeating a story to the same person more than once a week.
4. Phone numbers, passwords, postal codes, etc., are not as easy to memorize.
5. Forgetting one item (among several) on a trip to the store.
6. Entering a room and forgetting why or what you were looking for.
7. As we age, many of us become busier and have more to remember. Getting organized can help. Helpful memory aids include:

8. Make notes. Keep a list of daily tasks that need to be done. Jot down reminders in a journal or an appointment book.
9. Don't procrastinate. Do things as soon as possible so they are not forgotten.
10. Pay attention when others speak. Listen carefully to remember their name or details of a story.
11. Repeat what you want to remember several times, and you'll likely remember it.
12. Set an alert on your cell phone or set your egg timer if you're afraid of forgetting an appointment or picking up the granddaughter from dance class.

Severe memory problems, however, can be a warning of more serious illnesses such as Alzheimer's. Be concerned if you forget the names of close family members, forget more than one conversation daily, repeat a story to the same person within a few hours, or completely forget something you've just done, such as a trip to the grocery store.

Experts are still learning how to keep our minds sharp as we age. What is known so far is that a healthy diet, adequate sleep, stress management, and regular moderate activity are linked to brain health. Research also shows that activities involving coordinating the mind and physical movement together seem more effective than doing a physical activity separate from a mental activity. A combination may provide more effective stimulation of the brain.

Try activities where you must "think" about how you need to move your body, like brushing your teeth with your less dominant hand (use your left hand instead of your right if you are right-handed), walk backwards up the stairs (but go slow and hold the handrail, please!), and other movements that are unfamiliar to you and you need to think as you do them. Learning to play a musical instrument is also an effective exercise for the brain. For example, learning to play the guitar requires your mind to coordinate both hands moving differently (one strumming, the other chording). And if you add singing along, you have plenty of physical activities for your brain to coordinate!

Yoga, Tai Chi, Pilates, Qigong, martial arts, and many types of dances are also excellent choices for mind-body exercises. Sports that require concentration or strategy may also be more effective in "working" your brain than just sitting and playing chess: for example, concentrate (more than you usually do!) on where you want to place your golf ball and how you must move to do that. Or the action you need to take to send your bowling ball or curling rock exactly where you want it to go. Tennis or badminton are other "strategy games" – as long as you are actively using your mind to concentrate on how you need to move your body to achieve a goal.

Another idea is to set up an "obstacle course" in your living room. You can do this as a workout or added to it: Step over pillows set on the floor, step sideways around footstools or chairs, and walk backwards around the dining room table. Set a ladder on the ground outside and step

between the rungs (go slow if you've never done this before!). All these suggestions keep your mind focused on moving your body in ways other than just moving it straight ahead. Even small efforts like concentrating on feeling your muscles while lifting weights can stimulate those brain neurons.

Eat healthfully, relax and sleep well, and concentrate on your movements – these are all helpful ways that may improve your brain health. Don't forget to think about it.

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