
SENIORS WORK HARDER TO REMEMBER

The Mature Brain Demands More Energy Than The Young Brain

Society tends to lump seniors into the "bad memory" category. That's not necessarily accurate. The mature brain rivals the younger brain when performing tasks requiring organization, planning and the manipulation of information. However, with age there is normally a slight decline in attention, certain aspects of language (names, etc.), visuospatial skills (depth perception, etc.) and memory. Concentration seems to be more difficult, too. The brain is working effectively. It just takes an increased effort to compensate for some of the capabilities that used to be taken for granted.

One process that demands this effort is the transfer of information from temporary to permanent storage. During this stage, information is "encoded" so that it can be retrieved when needed. Decreases in attention and concentration can prevent this critical step from taking place. Distractions (aches, vision and hearing impairments, reactions to medications) can hinder the focus necessary to complete encoding. Depression, anxiety and insomnia can sap the energy necessary to complete the process.

How do seniors overcome encoding problems? Some use sheer determination. This gives them the focus they need to complete the process. Others go by the philosophy of "use it or lose it". So they keep their minds and lives active. (In addition to being fun, bridge and bingo have shown to have positive effects on memory.) Some people use medications to increase energy levels and to deal with their medical distractions. With the extra effort, seniors can keep their minds sharper and disprove the stereotype of all seniors having bad memories.



The mature brains of seniors are organized differently and demand more energy to work effectively.

6 STEPS FOR IMPROVING SENIOR MEMORY

- 1) **Pay Attention** – Eliminate as many distractions as possible. Concentration time decreases with age, so try to keep periods of concentration to 15 minutes or less.
- 2) **Be Deliberate** – Be conscious of what you want to learn or remember. Keep it in the forefront of your mind and give it a value that makes it important and worth your extra effort.
- 3) **Create Meaning** – Make what you want to remember more meaningful. Create vivid mental images and relate the information to something you already know.
- 4) **Pace Yourself** – Learning may take a little longer than it did and be a little more tiring than it was when you were young. Don't get frustrated, go with the flow. Set attainable goals and be driven by your successes.
- 5) **Use Memory Aids** – Put checklists, schedules and visual cues to work for you...even when your ego would rather you didn't.
- 6) **Be Consistent** – Stick with your system and memory aids. Don't go changing things because it didn't work the first time.

(Sources: Older & Wiser by Richard M. Restak, M.D.)



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