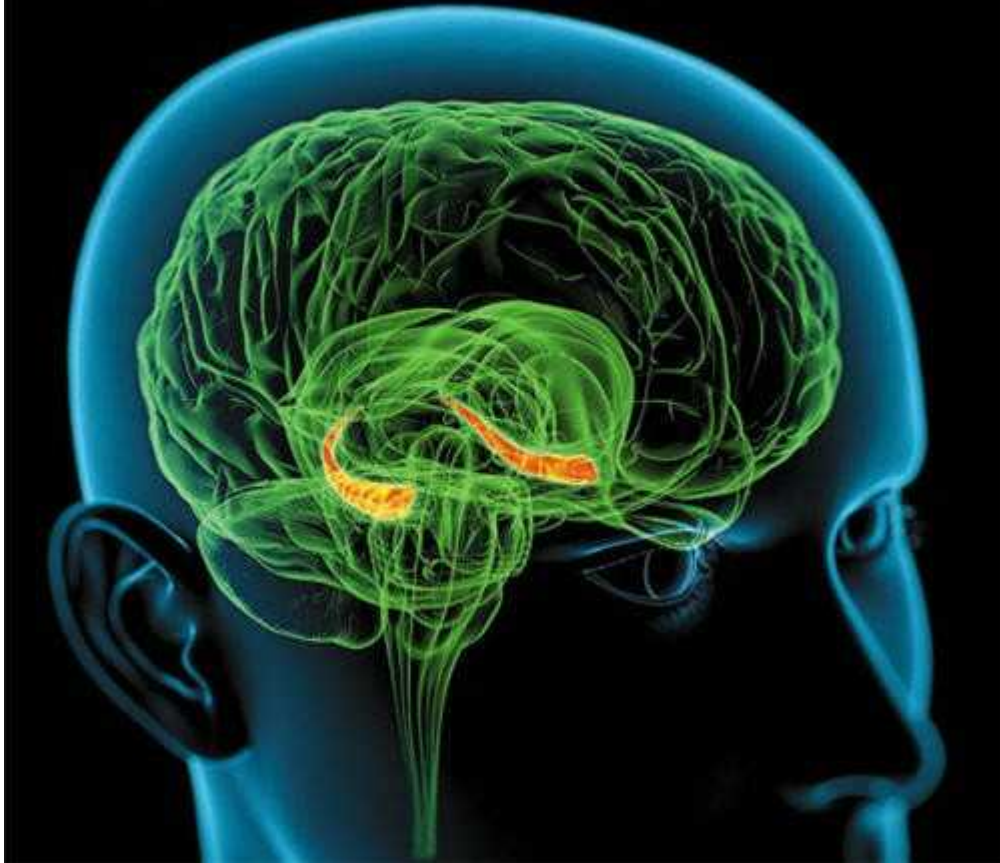


COPING WITH MEMORY LOSS



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What Is Memory Loss?

Memory loss has a simple definition, but living with it can range from mild to a complete life change. To have times in your memory when you just can't recall the information you're searching for means that you're forgetting what you once knew.

Sometimes these things could be what you learned in school years ago or the street name of the home you first lived in. You might have someone's name on the tip of your tongue, but searching through the memory files of your brain yields no results.

There might be days when you brought something home but can't recall where you put it. Many of us put stuff in a place where we just know we'll remember to find it - and then we can't for the life of us bring it back to mind.

Almost every person in the world at one time or another experiences times when they forget something. You know that you know the facts you're trying to get to in your brain, but it stays out of reach.

Forgetting things and being unable to recall certain dates of events or names of people isn't that big of a deal. But there is a line when it comes to the memory of what's normal and what's not. While some forgetfulness is to be expected (even at a young age) some cases of forgetfulness can signify that there's an underlying health problem.

There are symptoms of memory loss and they can range from ordinary to the point where it's a problem. Symptoms of normal memory loss are the inability to recall names, places or dates - but the person knows they can't remember.

They may even be able to tell you exactly what the forgetfulness or loss is. An example of normal forgetfulness would be, "We stopped at a town in Georgia...I can't remember the name of it!"

Another symptom of normal loss of memory would be a pause in a conversation as the brain seeks the words to say or the details to recall. More examples of normal loss would be if the person forgets things, but can function socially at the same level.

Forgetfulness can take on a life changing meaning when it begins to change the person with the inability to recall places or people or short-term memories. One symptom is difficulty carrying on a normal conversation.

This person appears confused by the topic and is often unable to understand what's being discussed. Another symptom is that this type of forgetfulness appears to get steadily worse. You might notice the person begins to act in ways that are not normal for him or her. They may forget to take care of themselves physically, such as in the area of hygiene or eating.

Memory loss can be a signal that nothing out of the ordinary is going on - or it could be a sign that a serious health issue needs to be addressed. Whenever you or a loved one experiences an inability to remember things, don't automatically assume the worst.

Just pay attention if it's a loved one and see if it worsens. If you notice yourself beginning to forget things more frequently, heading to the doctor for a checkup might be a good idea just to get reassurance on whether your symptoms are normal or not.

What Causes Memory Loss

There are several reasons for what causes memory loss. Medical science often labels both short and long term memory loss under the heading of 'amnesia,' which is then defined as complete or partial.

The most common way that any type of amnesia develops is through a head injury. This type of injury can be the result of a car accident or a simple slip and fall at home. Any type of head injury that's significant should be addressed by a doctor.

A head injury doesn't have to be severe in order for memory loss to occur. Contrary to some beliefs, even if someone was not rendered unconscious, head injury leading to loss of memory can still happen. In any situation where the heart stops or breathing is interrupted, the potential for memory loss exists.

Not all memory loss is caused by dramatic events - sometimes even a migraine can cause a temporary memory loss, but it's usually harmless. Alcohol can cause a person to become unable to recall events that took place while drinking.

If someone wakes up after a night of drinking with no memory of the night before, they've experienced alcohol related memory loss. Repeated alcohol related memory loss can have long consequences on the brain's ability to remember things because it interferes with the receptors in the brain.

Certain drugs - even those prescribed by a doctor - can cause memory loss. When the body lacks certain vitamins, this can cause an inability to remember.

Neurological disorders and diseases can alter the body's ability to remember (disorders like epilepsy or Parkinson's disease).

Any type of condition in which the brain gets an infection (such as Encephalitis) can impair the brain's ability to recall things. Chemotherapy for cancer treatment can cause people to become forgetful and lead to short term memory loss.

An event that is so traumatic to remember and would put the person in great emotional pain can cause memory loss. This is a natural measure the brain utilizes in order to protect someone from dealing with an emotional overload.

The brain will block the memories until the person feels safe enough and capable enough emotionally to handle the disturbing event. Alzheimer's disease is another condition that can strike at the brain's ability to recall memories.

Usually long before a diagnosis is made, the symptoms of Alzheimer's have become too noticeable to ignore. People with this memory loss condition might suddenly start putting things where they don't belong. Confusion, personality changes and difficulty speaking are other symptoms of this condition.

Memory loss can also occur as a natural part of aging. These are usually lapses in the memory - walking into a room and forgetting the purpose for entering the room. These are little hiccups in the brain that happen for no apparent reason and are not usually health related.

Short Term Memory Loss Vs. Long Term Memory Loss

There are noticeable differences between short-term memory loss versus long term memory loss. To understand how they differ, you need to first know what memory means.

Just like a computer, your brain compiles data or memories. These memories consist of our childhood, our teenage years and our adulthood. In that data are the places we've lived, the pets we've had, the friends we've known.

Along with that personal data, we store in our brains data pertaining to other people, too. Our friends' birthdays, their likes and dislikes, our work related memories – meetings, parties, projects completed and waiting to be completed. The brain then holds onto all of this data. Things that inspire us or mean a lot to us are usually easier for us to retrieve.

When we want to get to the data, just like a computer, we search our memory and the brain gives us the desired information. Whether the information is considered short or long term memory depends on where the information is kept

in the brain, because we don't keep all of the information we gather in the same part of the brain.

When someone experiences short term loss, it means that they can't retrieve information about the present, but can remember events or places, facts or people from the past. This type of loss is often considered mild and more of a nuisance than an indication of a serious disorder.

Between short-term memory loss and long-term memory loss, the latter can be the most difficult to handle for those suffering from it and for the friends and family who must deal with the consequences of it in the people they care about.

This type of memory loss means that a person struggles to recall past memories. Between the two types of memory loss (short or long), long is the one that people find the toughest to handle. People and events that have been part of cherished memories for years suddenly have no significance to this person.

There are some similarities between the two types of memory loss. When dealing with short term, the significance of the loss can range from mild to severe - just as it can in long term. In both, the timeline of the inability to recall memories can last anywhere from moments to years.

In most cases however, the major difference between those who have short-term memory loss versus long-term memory loss is that some short-term memory loss is recoverable while many long term is not. The outcome depends on the cause of the memory loss and the treatment for the loss.

Treatment For Memory Loss

If you've noticed that you've had times where you've had trouble remembering things, you should know there is treatment for memory loss. Although the brain is not a muscle, scientists in the health field believe it can benefit from being exercised like a muscle.

We all know what happens when muscles are not used regularly. They begin to atrophy. An unused muscle turns into a weak muscle, unable to function properly. You don't have to let the same thing happen with your brain's ability to function.

While the brain has the capacity to store vast quantities of information (and even in some cases to heal itself in the event of injury), if it's not challenged (a form of exercise for the brain), then it ceases to stay as sharp.

To stimulate the brain and help aid in the event of forgetfulness, you can engage in games that are specially designed to help increase the brain's ability to remember. Memory games are thought to be a way to activate the brain and stimulate the areas that focus on concentration and memory.

By taking part in brain games that are scientific in nature (such as puzzles or brain teasers), you can develop a fitness routine for your memory. Optical illusions can be a great way to stimulate the brain and help with memory loss. Anything that flexes the brain can be helpful.

But games aren't the only treatment for memory loss. Learning a new skill can help jog the brain's memory by raising the level of activity in the brain. No matter how old you are, you should never stop learning.

If you've always wanted to learn how to play the piano, then start taking lessons. Want to learn how to speak French? Find a tutor. Anything you do that causes the brain to learn is a form of mental exercise and the brain reaps benefits from the learning activities. Learning helps memory improve because learning is done in the same hemisphere of the brain where some memories are stored.

Sometimes, while games can be an effective way to recharge the brain's memory center and help with loss of memory, it isn't always enough for some people. If you've found that games or learning new skills aren't helping with your memory, you might want to see your doctor about getting on medication that can treat your symptoms in order to improve it.

If your memory loss is due to a health problem such as a stroke or from having ADHD, there are drugs that can help with the loss of memory. In mild to moderate cases, the treatment for memory loss is quick and simple. For people who suffer from loss associated with dementia or Alzheimer's, the treatment may focus more on slowing the loss of memory.

Improving Memory

You might feel that you have so much information packed in your brain (information overload) that some of it leaks out to make room for something new, resulting in some form of memory loss.

You know there's nothing wrong with your brain and that you don't have any health issues that make you forget things sometimes. But you don't like the times when you can't always hold on to the information you want.

Information like retaining the names of new people you meet is one example. Wanting to make sure you retain information when studying for exams or

learning about new aspects of doing your job is another. You usually have a great memory, but you want to learn ways of improving memory.

Although the brain has amazing abilities, it is limited by what we put into it or don't put into it. No matter how much cognitive prowess you have, you can limit your brain's ability to function by having poor health or by going too long without getting the proper amount of rest or sleep.

Both can affect the brain's ability to increase the memory. Did you know that certain foods can enhance the brain's ability to remember things? Did you also know that when you sleep, your brain is busy working - much like a computer's defrag tool? It's busy gathering your memories and combining them. Losing sleep can interfere with your brain's natural defrag department.

Besides ensuring good health and plenty of rest for improving memory, social interaction helps the brain hold on to its ability to function in the memory capacity. Interacting with others one on one or in a group setting helps stretch and exercise the brain. Always make sure you have something new to learn on the horizon. When you accomplish something or master it, move on to something that offers your brain a challenge.

You can increase your brain's memory potential by stretching your powers of observation. You can do this by watching people walk by and then writing down what you observed about them - their clothing, hair coloring, height, accessories, etc. One way sharpen the memory is to use a method of learning that makes it easy for you. For example, many children learned the alphabet thanks to the popular ABC song.

Other ways of improving your memory include utilizing visuals - using photographs, charts, graphs, etc. to retain information. Another way is to assign information with keywords or phrases or even single letters of the alphabet.

For example, if you wanted to learn the seven continents, you could either use an acronym or assign the first letter of each continent in alphabetical order (A, A, A, A, E, NA, SA). The trick for having and maintaining a great memory is to use it every day. Memorize something new - always add to your memory bank and never stop learning.

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