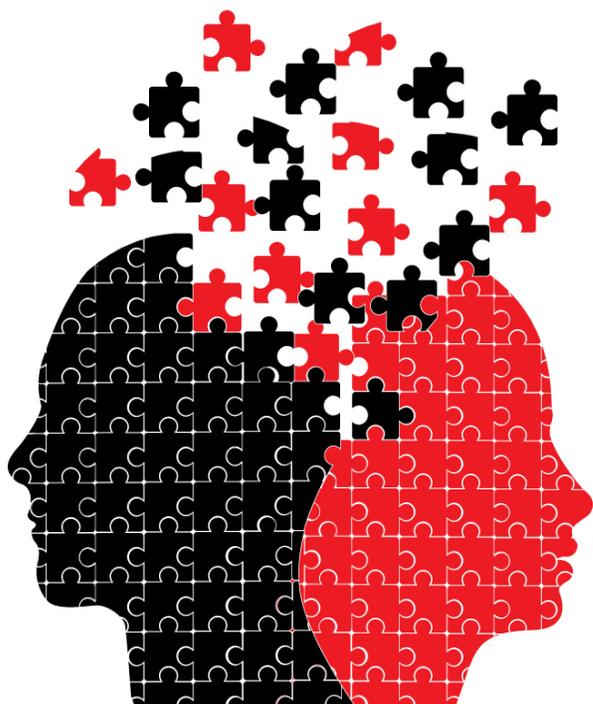


# How to Cope with Memory Loss



## Information for patients and families

Read this information to learn:

- how our memory works
- the types of memory we use in everyday life
- the causes and signs of memory loss
- how to cope



## How does our memory work?

Our memory is an important tool that we use every day. It helps us remember things like:

- when to take our medicines
- to turn off the stove after we've used it
- to pay our bills and meet deadlines
- the names and faces of people we've met

Our brains follow steps in a certain order so that we can remember things. Memory problems can happen at any one of these steps:



### Step 1:

We prepare the information before we store it. This is called **encoding**.



### Problem:

We don't prepare the information properly.



### Step 2:

We store the information so we can use it later. This is called **storage**.



### Problem:

We don't store the information correctly.



### Step 3:

We find the information when we need it. This is called **retrieval**.



### Problem:

We can't find the information. Sometimes it's lost and sometimes we find it eventually.

Problems at any one of these steps can cause us to have difficulty when we try to use our different types of memory.

## **What different types of memory do we use?**

There are many different types of memory that we use in our everyday lives. These can include:

- **Short-term memory (also called working memory)**

We use our short-term memory when we use information for only a short time. It can be for a few seconds or a few minutes. For example, you may look up a telephone number in a phone book and dial it. Most times, you forget the number after you make your call.

- **Long-term memory**

We use our long-term memory when we use information after a long time has passed since the memory was made. For example, we remember where we lived when we were children.

- **Procedural memory**

We use our procedural memory to remember how to do activities or routines in our everyday lives. It helps us remember how to do things like make dinner, use a computer, ride a bike, or get dressed.

- **Semantic memory**

We use our semantic memory when we remember facts that don't have to do with us personally. For example, we remember things we learned in school, like what happened during World War I.

- **Episodic memory**

We use episodic memory to remember events that happened in our lives. For example, we may remember what happened at a specific birthday party. Or, we may remember losing a camera while on vacation.

## What causes memory loss?

Having some trouble with your memory doesn't always mean you have a problem. We may naturally find that some things are easier or harder to remember. Some people remember events from the past more easily than recent ones. Some people have a better memory for faces than names. Many things can affect how well we remember things. These include:

- stress
- anxiety (worry)
- depression
- stroke
- serious brain injury
- neurological disorders such as:
  - multiple sclerosis
  - Parkinson's disease
  - dementia including Alzheimer's disease

Sometimes our memory for events that happened before an illness or injury (such as a stroke or brain injury) is not affected as much as our memory after. This kind of memory problem after an illness or injury is called **amnesia**.

## What are the signs of memory loss?

The signs of memory loss include things like:

- forgetting information such as appointments or important dates
- misplacing objects
- forgetting to turn off the stove or kettle

If you or your family notice changes in your memory, talk to a member of your health care team. They can help you find out what would help. Sometimes our memory can improve with certain brain exercises or therapy. We can also learn new ways to cope with and manage our memory loss.

## What will help me cope with memory problems?

Memory problems can happen at any 1 of the 3 steps our brains use to remember things. Sometimes we can remember things with a hint or after some time has passed. Other times we may not remember them at all. Knowing where the breakdown is helps us find out what the problem is and how best to cope.

There may be exercises you can do to improve your memory. The ones that work for you will depend on the reasons for your memory loss and where your break down happens.

Some examples of exercises that can help include:

- card games, memory-matching or sorting games
- some computer games

These types of games can help your memory improve. They can also improve how well you can concentrate, which will help your memory.

Other examples include:

- rehearsing information (repeating it again and again)
- recording the information you want to remember

These exercises can help improve the way you **encode (Step 1)** information.

**There are also tips you can use that will help you manage or cope with your memory loss better.** Doing the best you can with the memory you have may be the best choice for you.

Some examples of tips to help you remember include:

- using a day timer to keep track of important appointments or deadlines
- using a watch with an alarm to remind you to take your medicines on time
- writing down or listing the things you need to remember in a notebook
- storing items in the same place at home or work

It's important to use the same way to remember things each time. This will help you know where to find what you are looking for.

You may also want to work with a health care professional, such as an occupational therapist. They can show you things you can do that would be most helpful to you.

## **Who can I talk to if I have questions about memory loss?**

You can talk to your family doctor if you are still worried about your memory. You or your doctor can contact a Home and Community Care Services occupational therapist for more help.

You can find more information about how occupational therapy can help at this website:

### **Canada's occupational therapy resource website**

[www.otworks.ca](http://www.otworks.ca) and click **"Interested in Your Wellness"**



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