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Memory Strategies Information

- **Keep notepads** by the telephone for messages and by the bed for last-minute reminders for **the next day**.
- **Use a whiteboard. Use a Dictaphone. Use Post-it notes.**
- **Keep** a wall calendar in the kitchen or hallway to remind you of upcoming events, birthdays, anniversaries, deadlines for bill payments. Tick off the days on the calendar to remind you of today's date or use a clock **that also displays the date**.
- **Use** an alarm clock. Put reminder alarms in a **mobile phone or pager**.
- **Keep a pocket** diary for important dates, phone numbers, appointments, maps, bus timetables, and to record any conversations or ideas throughout the day. This may not only help with remembering upcoming events but it may also provide a temporal frame of reference to help you remember when a particular event occurred in the past.
- Make **to-do lists**. This may help with not only remembering but also *prioritising* what you need to do, so that you don't have to 'do things now before you forget' and so that more urgent, rather than the more convenient, tasks get done sooner.
- **Use shopping lists. Use an electronic organiser**. Writing a list may help you to mentally **compartmentalise information** so that it can be more easily stored in your memory and retrieved later. E.g. group a list of grocery items in terms of where they might be found at the store - fruit & veg, dairy, deli, etc.
- **Use a dosette box or Webster-Pak** to keep track of when you have and when you haven't taken medications. Missing doses or taking double doses can be dangerous!
- Label drawers, cupboards, canisters, boxes, etc. **Use clear storage containers** or use different coloured labels / containers for different items for quick retrieval.

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- **Create visual cues for yourself.** E.g. If a light globe has just blown, leave the bulb near the front door to remind you to buy a replacement or to add it to a shopping list.
- **Minimise clutter** so that things can be found more easily. **Keep items in the same** place. Not only can this mean less time spent looking for things, it makes it easy to see what grocery items you have and what you might need.
- **Use a key ring holder** and leave sunglasses, umbrellas, mobile phones, etc. on an entry table/ hatstand. These will act as visual cues on your way out the door.
- **Take your time when learning new names.** Concentrate on the person's name when meeting them. If you didn't hear the person clearly, ask them to repeat their name. If it's an unusual name, ask them how it is spelt. **Repeat the person's name** as you greet them ("Nice to meet you, John") or use their name shortly after in conversation ("John, is it true that..." or "John, tell me about...") to consolidate it in your memory. Repeat the name to yourself while looking at the person. Spend a few moments to **make associations between the person and their name** (e.g. Holly looks jolly; Jack looks like Jack Nicholson). The more personal, unique, emotive, or funny the association, the more memorable it is likely to be.
- **Follow a routine.** E.g. walk the dog at the same time each afternoon, pay rent on a certain day of the week; check the smoke-alarm battery on the same day each year.
- **Minimise the amount you need to remember.** E.g. **set up an automatic bill-pay function** using internet banking so that you don't need to remember to pay rent.
- **Associate one task with another.** Linking an. activity with another (more automatic or more over-learned) activity increases the likelihood that you'll remember it. For example, if taking medications with meals, leave your pill box on the kitchen counter. If taking medications before bed, leave a glass of water on the bedside table to remind you.
- **Associate the familiar with the unfamiliar.** Associate new material with material you already know. E.g. this new banking system reminds me of one I've used before.
- **Focus on one thing** at a time. Break a complex activity into smaller tasks and concentrate on each task separately.
- **Don't practice mistakes.** Sometimes it's surprising how well we remember mistakes. When learning a new task, take your time and ensure that you're correct at each step.
- **Chunk information. Reduce lengthy information into more manageable components.** E.g. break a phone number down into smaller, more meaningful or memorable parts.
- **Use mnemonics.** Rhymes, pictures, and acronyms may assist in learning information. For example, "30 days hath September" and the musical notes Every Good Boy Deserves Fruit.

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- **Verbalise or Visualise it.** If you prefer to use verbal memory, focus on the names of streets or landmarks when learning directions. Or if you prefer to use visual memory, visualise the path you need to travel and the landmarks you pass along the way. The more strategies you use, the more likely you are to remember the information.
- **Repetition.** Don't expect to remember everything the first time around. Practice learning the information over and over again. Reward yourself when making progress.
- Give yourself a chance. Finding your car in a busy parking station can be a difficult task at the best of times. Take note of the location (colour/number) of the car space *before leaving*. Or routinely park in the same area and take note when you don't!
- **Make scrap** books, photo-albums, family movies, etc. This may help you to group information together or to remember events that happened at a certain time or place.
- **Consider distractions before attending to them.** If the distraction is not urgent, consider finishing the task that you started before commencing another. If you decide to walk away from a task, remember to put down any materials that you were using so that you can find them easily when you resume the task. Or if you decide to ignore the distraction, perhaps add it to a to-do list so that you remember to attend to it later.
- **Ensure you have sufficient space** for any project you're working on. This should ensure that you can easily see everything that you need in front of you and minimise the likelihood that you will be distracted by other tasks in your field of view.
- **Set realistic goals.** Don't attempt to complete too many tasks in one day or too many tasks at once, as something will inevitably be forgotten.
- **Monitor your mood.** Information learnt when in a particular mood is usually more easily retrieved when in that mood. (E.g. Happy memories are more easily retrieved when in a good mood). Therefore, new material may need to be practiced when in different moods to ensure that it is more easily retrieved more often.
- **Select several settings.** Information learnt in a certain setting is usually more easily retrieved when in that setting. Therefore, new material may need to be practiced in several different settings to ensure that it is more easily retrieved more often.
- **Keep active.** Memory difficulties make some activities more challenging but not impossible. You may be a little slower at crosswords but that's no reason to stop! Be assertive. If you feel you are expected to achieve the impossible, assertiveness may be required if you want to effectively pace yourself or manage your workload.
- **Manage your stress levels.** Be aware that stress and fatigue can compound memory problems, which in turn can increase stress and fatigue, malting for a vicious cycle.

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- **Boost your self confidence.** Memory loss can result in reduced interest in activities. Taking up new activities, such as voluntary work, may help to maintain or develop skills and restore structure to your day. Opening up to others about your memory problems may help to overcome awkwardness or embarrassment in social situations.
- **Capitalise on your strengths.** Some activities may no longer be rewarding if memory difficulties become too problematic. Adapting to this may require you to broaden your interests and pursue new goals. Some activities may allow you to compensate for memory difficulties more than others, letting you focus more on your strengths.
- **Optimise overall health. Eat a balanced diet, avoid excessive drinking and drug-taking, and practice good sleeping habits.** Exercise, relax, and challenge yourself regularly. Engage in pleasurable activities, pursue special interests, and learn new skills. Focus on the positive and spend plenty of quality time with those you love.

This information sheet was compiled by UNE Intern Clinical Psychologist, Katrina Leonard, UNE Memory Assessment Clinic, for the New England Division of General Practice, from the following resources:

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<http://www.alzheimers.org.au/content.cfm?infopageid=398>

Clare, L., & Wilson, B. A. (1997). *Coping with memory problems: A practical guide for people with memory impairments, their relatives, friends, and carers*. Thames Valley Test Company: Suffolk, England.

Neuropsychology Department, St Vincent's Hospital, Lismore. (n.d.) *My memory tool box*. Presented at the annual Department of Ageing, Disability, and Home Care's Mind Your Memory seminars throughout NSW, Australia.