

Forget About It

Everybody forgets stuff. It drives me crazy when I suddenly can't remember the names of people that I know very well, or I go upstairs to get something and stand in the hall wondering why I went there in the first place. Should I be worried? Or is this normal? Is there anything I could -- or should -- do about it?

No need to worry, reassures Majid Fotuhi, MD, PhD -- it's just middle age. Dr. Fotuhi is assistant professor of neurology at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, and director of the Memory Disorders Unit at Sinai Hospital of Baltimore. He is also author of [*The Memory Cure*](#) (McGraw-Hill).

Middle-Age Forgetfulness: A Normal Rite of Passage

Dr. Fotuhi told me that a certain amount of memory loss is normal as we grow older, and the last thing an otherwise healthy middle-aged person needs to worry about is Alzheimer's disease. One clue that nothing serious is wrong is the fact that you're worried about it in the first place. *Another clue:* People with minor memory loss due to normal aging respond well to hints and cues to jog their memories.

In contrast, people with Alzheimer's disease remain at sea, can't put their finger on what is wrong and try desperately to hide their growing confusion. They experience changes in personality, behavior and language as well as memory.

The Memory Protection Plan

That said, there is no reason to lie back and resign yourself to memory loss. There are plenty of steps you can take to keep your memory sharp. In *The Memory Cure*, Dr. Fotuhi outlines a memory protection plan to fine-tune your recollection skills and keep a lid on the annoying forgetfulness associated with aging. *Among his recommendations...*

- **Have a complete checkup.** Many potentially reversible medical conditions can be responsible for a faulty memory.
 - Get your blood pressure checked and under control. High blood pressure, known as the "silent killer," can damage the blood vessels that feed the brain as well as the heart and kidneys.
 - In addition, many other medical conditions -- including sleep disorders, depression, anxiety, alcoholism and metabolic disorders such as thyroid problems and diabetes -- can contribute to memory loss. Addressing these conditions can help control forgetfulness.
 - Ask your health-care provider to check your B-12 levels. An adequate level of this vitamin is essential to efficient day-to-day function of the brain, explains Dr. Fotuhi. Due to poor absorption, some people develop B-12 deficiencies as they age, leading to symptoms such as low energy, fatigue and impaired memory. In addition, B-12 deficiency can create problems with neurotransmitter and central nervous system function, both of which directly impact memory. If your B-12 levels are low, consider a monthly injection or a high-quality pill or liquid supplement prescribed by your health-care provider.
 - In perimenopausal women, stress, a lack of sleep and hormonal changes can lead to fuzzy thinking. Dr. Fotuhi points out that the problem is really one of concentration rather than memory, and after menopause, this all returns to normal. Synthetic hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is generally not recommended, as it is associated with an increased risk for breast cancer, heart attack, stroke, blood

clots and dementia. However, *Daily Health News* contributing editor Andrew L. Rubman, ND, states that bioidentical HRT will aid the brain in the creation and management of such hormones as DHEA, which is necessary for many aspects of brain function that directly affect memory.

- Check your medications. Dr. Fotuhi warns that many medicines -- including painkillers, antihistamines, antidepressants and sleeping pills -- can affect memory function. If you take more than one medicine a day, drug interactions can include dizziness and memory loss. It's important to review all medications that you take with your health-care provider, including dietary supplements and over-the-counter remedies. Take the lowest possible effective dose of any drug and ask if there are alternative medicines associated with fewer side effects. Keep in mind that as you age, your metabolism slows down and drugs stay in your system longer. This means that you may do just fine with a lower dose, with the benefit of experiencing fewer side effects.
- **Stay physically active.** According to Dr. Fotuhi, the cheapest, safest and most effective medicine for brain function is 30 minutes or more of uninterrupted walking at least three times a week.
- **Give your brain a workout.** "Use it or lose it" applies to the brain as much as to the muscles, observes Dr. Fotuhi. When you work your muscles, they get stronger. The same goes for your brain. Keep in good cognitive shape by reading, doing crossword puzzles, practicing a favorite hobby or craft, or learning a new skill, such as how to play a musical instrument.
- **Stay connected.** Isolated individuals are more likely to experience depression and anxiety, which can interfere with concentration and memory. Keep in touch with your friends, and volunteer in your community.
- **Develop patterns and stick to them.** For example, hang up your coat and put your keys in the same spot every time you walk in the door. Keep all your bills together in one place and pay them at the same time each month.
- **Examine your lifestyle.** Make sure that you get a good balance of rest and exercise, practice relaxation techniques such as meditation, steer clear of unhealthy habits such as smoking and overindulging in alcohol, and follow a healthy diet.

You're as Young as You Feel

Twenty years ago, being in your 60s was considered old, says Dr. Fotuhi. Now, people in their 60s are insulted if you suggest they're getting on in years. They say they're *only* in their sixties. You, too, can remain alert and engaged, as you grow older. To stay sharp, put together your own memory protection plan. Create a healthy lifestyle and keep a sense of humor -- from time to time everyone drives off with the coffee cup still on the roof of the car.