

As part of normal aging, changes occur in our brain in the absence of any disease. As part of this normal aging, some changes in the ability to think are expected. We have found that healthy older adults experience mild decline in some of their cognitive abilities. These changes may affect a person's memory of words and pictures, ability to focus our attention, or ability to name objects. Research also shows that brain volume decreases with age, but it is not clear if this "shrinkage" of the brain is directly related to the changes in our ability to think as we age.

Keeping Your Memory Sharp

What may seem like a faltering memory may actually be a decline in the rate at which we learn to store new information. Practice these memory skills to enhance learning and to help make remembering easier:

- **Relax:** Tension and stress are associated with memory lapses. Managing stress improves memory.
- **Concentrate:** Your teachers were right — If you want to recall something later, pay attention.
- **Focus:** Try to reduce distractions and minimize interferences.
- **Slow Down:** If you are rushing, you may not be focused or paying full attention.
- **Organize:** Keep important items in a designated place that is visible and easily accessed.
- **Write It Down:** Carry a notepad and calendar, and write down important things.
- **Repeat It:** Repetition improves recall. Try repeating names and facts when you are learning new information.
- **Visualize It:** Associating a visual image with something you want to remember can improve memory recall.

What is normal brain aging?

The idea that it is normal to become "senile" is now felt to be out of date. While there are normal changes in our ability to think that occur as we age, researchers believe that if a person can keep his/her brain healthy as they age, the changes that occur in thinking ability should not deter one from functioning normally in life.

Can the aging process of the brain be slowed down?

There is emerging evidence that certain lifestyle changes may help prevent future memory loss. There are studies showing that people who maintain physical activity, mental activity, social engagement, and a healthy diet tend to maintain their memory as they age.

Physical Activity

Physical activity is beneficial in decreasing the risk of chronic diseases including congestive heart disease, colon and breast cancers. There is also evidence that physical activity may help improve or maintain memory function even after memory problems have begun. Current physical activity guidelines from the American College of Sports Medicine and the American Heart Association for adults over the age of 65 include:

Developing a physical activity plan with a health professional.

Performing balance exercises to decrease the risk of falling, along with strength training.

Meeting or exceeding 30 minutes of moderate activity most days of the week to maintain physical and functional health, this would include: *walking, biking, swimming, chair aerobics, housework, or gardening.*



Mental Activity

We know from studies that people who live a life full of activities that engage their brain have less decline in their memory as they age. In addition, focused memory training may help maintain memory function before or after memory problems develop. Some ideas to increase the activities in your life that engage your brain are:

- Crossword Puzzles, Sudoku Puzzles, Jigsaw Puzzles and others
- Maintain strong friendships
- Volunteering
- Reading and writing
- Learning new languages, hobbies, interests, or games
- Taking adult education courses

Social Engagement

People with larger social networks may have less mental decline, and people who have more social activities in their life may have a lower risk of developing dementia. We think that more social interaction is also important for those people who have developed dementia. Some ways to maintain social engagement include:

- Volunteer
- Join a book club, sports league, or senior center
- Join a religious or spiritual group
- Join a club or social activity group

Diet

People who follow a diet rich in vegetables, fish, and vitamin E and low in saturated fats may have less risk of memory loss. Studies also show that people who follow a Mediterranean diet may have less loss of memory even if they already have memory problems. The Mediterranean Diet includes:

- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Whole grains including cereals and breads
- Legumes (beans)
- Nuts
- Fish
- Olive oils

The Mediterranean Diet limits saturated fats such as those found in full-fat dairy products, butter, margarine and red meats. It is also low in hydrogenated oils (trans-fatty acids), added salts, and added sugars.

 Unity Memory Center

2655 Ridgeway Avenue, Suite 420
Rochester NY 14626

(585) 723-7972

www.unityhealth.org/memorycenter