

The York University Staff Association Health & Wellness News & Views

You regularly ransack the house to find your keys. You suddenly can't recall the name of your kids teacher. You forget an appointment that you made last week. Sound Familiar? Fear of losing your mind... Fear not, most forgetfulness isn't anything serious. Memory loss can happen at any age for a number of reasons. Lack of sleep, stress, anxiety and even vitamin deficiency can impact memory. The good news is your brain is a dynamic organ, constantly adapting and changing. For better or for worse, that is the question? Memory can improve with simple powerful interventions. A healthy lifestyle will support brain health and even encourage your brain to grow. Here are some surprising things that impact memory in both good and not so good ways.

I don't believe that a stress-free life is possible. Stress is a response to challenges in life, and a life without challenges is too boring to contemplate. Therefore there is always going to be stress in our lives. What's damaging is the distress we feel internally in response to it. A sudden emergency can make it tough to recall something as simple as your home address. The reaction our bodies experience when routinely responding to stress by going into fight or flight mode can cause memory to become impaired. Finding ways to relieve stress may help. Start by eliminating unnecessary stress. Stop procrastinating, be more organized, don't be late... Simply put - **Simplify life**... Simplify your routines, your commitments, your information intake, your cluttered rooms, the mass of stuff going on in your life and have less stress as a result. Practice meditation. Of all of the mental trainings, affirmations, psychotherapy, positive thinking, yoga, the one thing that has been far and away the most studied in terms of effects on the brain is **meditation**. Studies suggest that long-term meditation practice has helped strengthen brains that are able to not just enjoy life but sustain a sense of positive well-being, even in stressful moments. So sit for at least five minutes daily. You'll maintain a sense of being committed to your health and no matter what, you'll feel better.

Last night's party makes it easy to forget your new coworkers name the next day. As the rest of our body takes a siesta when we sleep, deeper areas of the brain involving memory and emotional response required while dreaming do not. While you snooze, your brain cycles through different phases of sleep, including light sleep, deep sleep, and rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, when dreaming often occurs.. The non-REM stages of sleep seem to prime the brain for good learning the next day. If

you haven't slept, your ability to learn and remember new things could drop by up to 40%. Sorry kids, You can't pull an all-nighter and still learn effectively. Lack of sleep affects the brain, and overall evidence suggests that adequate sleep each day is very important for learning and memory.

A surprising common source of memory loss is vitamin B-12 deficiency. B-12 intake is necessary for healthy brain function. A blood test is required to test your level of B-12. Like most vitamins, B₁₂ can't be made by the body. Instead, it must come from dietary sources such as, milk, cheese, yogurt, eggs and fish, or supplements. Some people don't consume enough vitamin B₁₂ to meet their needs, while others can't absorb enough, no matter how much they take in. Vitamin B₁₂ deficiency is relatively common, especially among aging population. The human body needs vitamin B₁₂ to make red blood cells, nerves, DNA, and carry out other functions. The average adult should get 2.4 micrograms a day. Vitamin B₁₂ deficiency can be slow to develop, causing symptoms to appear gradually and intensify over time. It can also come on relatively quickly. Given the array of symptoms, the condition can be overlooked or confused with something else. Symptoms may include: Difficulty thinking and reasoning (cognitive difficulties), or memory loss, paranoia or hallucinations, weakness, and fatigue. If you are concerned about your level of B-12 consult your physician.

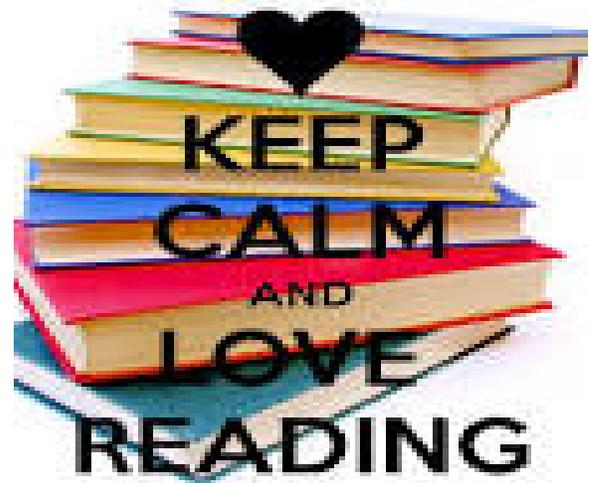
Whether you're smoking cigarettes or something a little more illicit, you're not doing your memory any favours. When you smoke, you deprive your brain of much needed oxygen, which can lead to overall fuzziness and decreased mental acuity. Face memory is apparently a particular sore spot for smokers. Studies indicate that in comparison to non-smokers, individuals who smoke are more likely to have a hard time matching names and faces. Our memory tends to become worse as we age, smoking accelerates the process. That doesn't mean that you're automatically going forget your dogs face if you smoke continuously for 20 years or something, just that you'll have a significantly higher level of difficulty remembering faces and where you've put stuff than if you don't smoke. It has even been found that there is no difference between memory degeneration in social smokers and heavy smokers. That is to say, it doesn't make a difference if you smoke 15 cigarettes a day or 2, your memory will be affected the same. However, kicking the habit returns your memory to its previous condition... Nuff said.

Whether you're trying to get your brain back into shape or you just want to keep it as strong as it is now, it's not only easy to train your brain but it's now considered a part of what makes aging a lot more graceful and less forgetful. Get that gray matter up off your skull-couch and get to work. **Physical Exercise** and regular sweat sessions help to keep memory sharp. Physical activity improves mood, and sleep and by doing so, it invariably improves memory. Exercise encourages your brain to work at optimum capacity by stimulating nerve cells to multiply, strengthening their interconnections, and protecting them from damage. Coincidentally 30 minutes 4 days a week is all it takes for the best memory boost! No more excuses.

Along with physical activity, your brain needs mental stimulation to stay fit, and when it comes to mental stimulation, novelty is important, here's why: The more you use your mind to perform a task, whether it's cooking your favorite dish or driving to the grocery store, the less effort your brain requires to complete that task. If you feel like your brain's on autopilot most or all of the time, that's an indication that you need to increase the challenge a little bit.

One of the best ways to do that is to stay socially active. Following and contributing to a conversation requires a lot of mental prowess. Visiting intellectually invigorating places, like museums or cultural centers, and learning new skills are also great ways to keep your brain in shape. Even mixing in some variety when it comes to your favorite activities like trying out a new recipe or cooking technique will keep your mind off autopilot.

If you want to boost your memory drink **Green tea**. Studies show that drinking a beverage containing 27.5 grams of green tea showed increased cognitively between brain cells compared to those who drank a non-green tea beverage. The increased activity was accompanied by improved performance on working memory tasks, and research suggests that green tea may be useful for treating cognitive impairments, including dementia. Cheers to that.



Read as much as you can. Reading is great basic brain exercise. You can read newspapers, magazines or books but just keep in mind that the more challenging the text is, the more of a workout your brain will get. Like any exercise, start small and work your way up.

The brain is an incredible piece of equipments designed for you to use. Yaya... I get it - You're a busy person with a to-do list a mile long, and that work/family/social life juggling act is taking its toll on your memory. *What steps have you taken to protect your memory lately? Health & intellect are the two blessings in life, let's look after both.*

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