

IMPROVING MEMORY

MEMORY PROBLEM NO----- CONCENTRATION PROBLEM YES

- × **Pay attention.** You can't remember something if you never learned it, and you can't learn something—that is, encode it into your brain—if you don't pay enough attention to it. It takes about eight seconds of intense focus to process a piece of information into your memory. If you're easily distracted, pick a quiet place where you won't be interrupted.
- × **Involve as many senses as possible.** Try to relate information to colors, textures, smells and tastes. The physical act of rewriting information can help imprint it onto your brain. Even if you're a visual learner, read out loud what you want to remember. If you can recite it rhythmically, even better.
- × **Relate information to what you already know.** Connect new data to information you already remember, whether it's new material that builds on previous knowledge, or something as simple as an address of someone who lives on a street where you already know someone.
- × **For more complex material, focus on understanding basic ideas** rather than memorizing isolated details. Practice explaining the ideas to someone else in your own words.
- × **Rehearse information you've already learned.** Review what you've learned the same day you learn it, and at intervals thereafter. This "spaced rehearsal" is more effective than cramming, especially for retaining what you've learned.

IMPROVING MEMORY TIP 1: DON'T SKIMP ON EXERCISE OR SLEEP

- ✘ **When you exercise the body, you exercise the brain**
- ✘ Treating your body well can enhance your ability to process and recall information. Physical exercise increases oxygen to your brain and reduces the risk for disorders that lead to memory loss, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Exercise may also enhance the effects of helpful brain chemicals and protect brain cells.

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- ✘ **Improve your memory by sleeping on it**
 - ✘ When you're sleep deprived, your brain can't operate at full capacity. Creativity, problem-solving abilities, and critical thinking skills are compromised. Whether you're studying, working, or trying to juggle life's many demands, sleep deprivation is a recipe for disaster.
 - ✘ But sleep is critical to learning and memory in an even more fundamental way. Research shows that sleep is necessary for memory consolidation, with the key memory-enhancing activity occurring during the deepest stages of sleep.

IMPROVING MEMORY TIP 2: MAKE TIME FOR FRIENDS AND FUN

- × **Healthy relationships: the ultimate memory booster?**
- × Humans are highly social animals. We're not meant to thrive, let alone thrive, in isolation. Relationships stimulate our brains—in fact, interacting with others may be the best kind of brain exercise.
- × Research shows that having meaningful relationships and a strong support system are vital not only to emotional health, but brain health. In one recent study from the Harvard School of Public Health, for example, researchers found that people with the most active social lives had the slowest rate of memory decline.
- × There are many ways to start taking advantage of the brain and memory-boosting benefits of socializing. Volunteer, join a club, make it a point to see friends more often, or reach out over the phone. And if a human isn't handy, don't overlook the value of a pet—especially the highly-social dog.

- × **Laughter is good for your brain**
- × You've heard that laughter is the best medicine, and that holds true for the brain as well as the body. Unlike emotional responses, which are limited to specific areas of the brain, laughter involves multiple regions across the whole brain.
- × Furthermore, listening to jokes and working out punch lines activates areas of the brain vital to learning and creativity. As psychologist Daniel Goleman notes in his book *Emotional Intelligence*, "laughter...seems to help people think more broadly and associate more freely."
- × Looking for ways to bring more laughter in your life? Start with these basics:
- × **Laugh at yourself.** Share your embarrassing moments. The best way to take ourselves less seriously is talk about times when we took ourselves too seriously.
- × **When you hear laughter, move toward it.** Most of the time, people are very happy to share something funny because it gives them an opportunity to laugh again and feed off the humor you find in it. When you hear laughter, seek it out and ask, "What's funny?"
- × **Spend time with fun, playful people.** These are people who laugh easily—both at themselves and at life's absurdities—and who routinely find the humor in everyday events. Their playful point of view and laughter are contagious.
- × **Surround yourself with reminders to lighten up.** Keep a toy on your desk or in your car. Put up a funny poster in your office. Choose a computer screensaver that makes you laugh. Frame photos of you and your family or friends having fun.
- × **Pay attention to children and emulate them.** They are the experts on playing, taking life lightly, and laughing.

IMPROVING MEMORY TIP 3: KEEP STRESS IN CHECK

- ✘ Stress is one of the brain's worst enemies. Over time, if left unchecked, chronic stress destroys brain cells and damages the hippocampus, the region of the brain involved in the formation of new memories and the retrieval of old ones.

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- ✘ The scientific evidence for the mental health benefits of meditation continues to pile up. Studies show that meditation helps improve many different types of conditions, including depression, anxiety, chronic pain, diabetes, and high blood pressure. Meditation also can improve focus, concentration, creativity, and learning and reasoning skills.
 - ✘ Meditation works its “magic” by changing the actual brain. Brain images show that regular meditators have more activity in the left prefrontal cortex, an area of the brain associated with feelings of joy and equanimity. Meditation also increases the thickness of the cerebral cortex and encourages more connections between brain cells—all of which increases mental sharpness and memory ability.

IMPROVING MEMORY TIP 4: BULK UP ON BRAIN-BOOSTING FOODS

- × Improving memory tip 4: Bulk up on brain-boosting foods
- × Just as the body needs fuel, so does the brain. You probably know already that a diet based on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and “healthy” fats will provide lots of health benefits, but such a diet can also improve memory. But for brain health, it’s not just what you eat—it’s also what you don’t eat. The following nutritional tips will help boost your brainpower and reduce your risk of dementia.
- × **Get your omega-3s.** More and more evidence indicates that omega-3 fatty acids are particularly beneficial for brain health. Fish is a particularly rich source of omega-3, especially cold water “fatty fish” such as salmon, tuna, halibut, trout, mackerel, sardines, and herring. In addition to boosting brainpower, eating fish may also lower your risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease. **If you’re not a fan of fish, consider turning to fish oil supplements. Other non-fish sources of omega-3s include** walnuts, ground flaxseed, flaxseed oil, pumpkin seeds, and soybeans.

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- × **Limit saturated fat.** Research shows that diets high in saturated fat increase your risk of dementia and impair concentration and memory. The primary sources of saturated fat are animal products: red meat, whole milk, butter, cheese, sour cream, and ice cream.
 - × **Eat more fruit and vegetables.** Produce is packed with antioxidants, substances that protect your brain cells from damage. Colorful fruits and vegetables are particularly good antioxidant superfood sources. Try leafy green vegetables such as spinach, broccoli, romaine lettuce, Swiss chard, and arugula, and fruit such as apricots, mangoes, cantaloupe, and watermelon.
 - × **Drink wine (or grape juice) in moderation.** Keeping your alcohol consumption in check is key, since alcohol kills brain cells. But in moderation (around 1 glass a day for women; 2 for men), alcohol may actually improve memory and cognition. Red wine appears to be the best option, as it is rich in resveratrol, a flavonoid that boosts blood flow in the brain and reduces the risk of Alzheimer's disease. Other resveratrol-packed options include grape juice, cranberry juice, fresh grapes and berries, and peanuts.

✘ **For mental energy, choose complex carbohydrates.**

✘ Just as a racecar needs gas, your brain needs fuel to perform at its best. When you need to be at the top of your mental game, carbohydrates can keep you going. But the type of carb you choose makes all the difference. Carbohydrates fuel your brain, but simple carbs (sugar, white bread, refined grains) give a quick boost followed by an equally rapid crash. For energy that lasts, choose complex carbohydrates such as whole-wheat bread, brown rice, oatmeal, high-fiber cereal, lentils, and whole beans.

IMPROVING MEMORY TIP 5: GIVE YOUR BRAIN A WORKOUT

- × **It's new.** No matter how intellectually demanding the activity, if it's something you're already good at, it's not a good brain exercise. The activity needs to be something that's unfamiliar and out of your comfort zone.
- × **It's challenging.** Anything that takes some mental effort and expands your knowledge will work. Examples include learning a new language, instrument, or sport, or tackling a challenging crossword or Sudoku puzzle.
- × **It's fun.** The more interested and engaged you are in the activity, the more likely you'll be to continue doing it and the greater the benefits you'll experience. The activity should be challenging, yes, but not so difficult or unpleasant that you dread doing it.

USE MNEMONIC DEVICES TO MAKE MEMORIZATION EASIER

✘ View hand out...Table 1