



## Memory Strategies After Brain Injury

*By: Melanie Atkins*

A whole lot of ideas that might help begin to address memory loss after brain injury.

You will need to work out which ones are likely to help. What works will change from person to person depending on the areas of memory affected.

I can make a big list of strategies look simple. I can make a big list look easy. The reality is hard work, patience and tweaking to make the strategy fit lifestyle and circumstances.

The important thing is to find strategies that best address the particular areas of memory loss while using the least amount of energy. Think of it like a bank account with limited funds – you want to take care of the money (brain energy) that is available and use it for what you need most.

The following memory strategies [use the broad strategy headings from last week's article Planning Successful Strategies For Memory Loss After Brain Injury.](#)

### **A note about electronic and technical aids as the new helpers:**

New technology and aids are constantly being developed. Not too long ago a Pager sending reminder messages was revolutionary. Now we have Smart-phones, laptops, tablets, watches, computer software and apps to help with all kinds of tasks. Keep a look out for new and helpful technologies but remember it needs to help – not increase the struggle.

### **Reduce the need to think:**

#### **Create External Memory Aids:**

Find a diary system that works for you – smart phone, annual planner, wall calendar, hard copy diary, appointment book, personal assistant, calendar app, electronic organizer, daily planner, family or support person.

Make the diary work – find the layout and size that suits. If the perfect diary can't be found add your own tweaks to it. Whatever is needed: a page for notes, a space for to do lists, a place to record memories – whatever works.

Work on finding reminder device/s that suit age, stage and lifestyle – phone calls, alarms, timer on a watch, pager, phone apps, other people, writing information down, instant messaging, writing on your hand – yes if that works many of us have done it at some time.

Add detail to address / contact list to help recognition and memory – additional details such as where the person fits in, relationship, a photo.

Use organising aids – written labels, checklists, color coding, sticky notes, notice board, white boards, organizing systems, storage systems.

### **Planning tools**

Find out what works for you and stick to it. Use the style of planning that suits lifestyle and what is familiar it might be written or computer based – mind mapping, excel spreadsheet, computer planning software, phone apps, wall planner.

### **Find ways to help recall information**

Recording on phone or tape, writing notes, assisting recall with prompts: another person prompting or giving information, using photographs or visual signs.

Leave something in an unusual place to prompt action. Leaving a sign on the steering wheel to remember to get petrol. Putting an empty packet in your bag to remind you to pick up that item when shopping.

Chunk or group information in a useful way- morning routine tasks, a list for what to take to school and school routine.

### **Investigate safety reminders:**

Appliances with timers, alarms, automatic cutoff switches e.g. heater, irons. Signs with visual warning reminders, smart watches and phone alarms.

### **Consider the wide range of media forms available:**

Think about how photographs could help. Especially now with cameras in our phones often with us wherever we go – take a snapshot of instructions, timetables, maps, people. Of whatever you need to remember.

Creative use of the many forms of social media to remember, to prompt and to recall. This diagram developed in 2008 shows the many, many forms of social media available



## **Be Super Organised**

Being organized and consistent can save time and energy. It can help energy, concentration, and paying attention because you are not trying to find things, or remember where they are. Strategies might include:

Practice regular ‘remembering’ routines – checking the after every meal, using phone apps at regular intervals, looking at the calendar when you get up in the morning. Whatever method of remembering is being used – practice, practice, practice using it.

Plan as much of each day as possible – beforehand.

A place for everything and everything in its place! Keep items that you frequently need, such as keys, wallet, diary, glasses always in the same place – all the time, every time.

Put things back where you find them.

Use your preferred planning and reminder tools to keep track of appointments, due dates for bills, birthdays and other time related tasks.

Keep all phone numbers and addresses in one place; an address book, your computer contacts, phone address book – and make sure there is a backup regularly.

Check out new ways to organize information – what might be useful. Bullet journaling is a relatively new way to organize information and remember things.

Experiment with ways to record notes on more complex material such as school study. Organize the notes into categories you can use later.

Think about how best to organize things like shopping trips. Making lists. Grouping things together. It may even be helpful to map the supermarket and organize lists for each aisle.

## **Pay Attention to Attention**

Once we understand that attention is important to learning and memory, we can understand strategies to improve attention are important:

Say No to multitasking – increasingly evidence shows it is not all it is cracked up to be. Focus on one thing at a time.

Reduce distractions around you – ideally find a quiet, uninterrupted place with minimal activity and decoration around to distract from the task or information.

Work out how remembering and learning happens best for you. Tailor the way you receive information to what works best – e.g. by seeing, hearing, doing, touching:

Try and have information presented in the way you remember best – e.g. if you are better hearing information record notes to playback later. If you learn better by seeing – is video available. YouTube can provide a wealth of visual information.

Where possible it might help to use what sense works best and one more to help it work: hearing and writing information down, reading information aloud, listening to instruction then doing.

Take time to pay attention – not only when getting information also allow some quiet time afterwards. Do you know that saying about “sinking in” – well yes the brain can benefit from time for information to “sink in”.

## **Use a Memory Trick or Two**

It might help to use either or both words and pictures in remembering and learning information.

Relate information to what you already know. Help your brain hook up new information to what you already remember- I remember things about the brain from primary school Or does it link to something familiar – your name is the same as my son.

Rehearse, repeat, review – over and over.

Sometimes – and only sometimes for some people – Mnemonics might help. Mnemonics is where you link one thing to remind you of another. A picture, rhyme, acronym, action or emotion that reminds you to do something, or recall information. Some are quite complex others simple associations – a red flag reminds me to turn the iron off. The sentence Every Good Boy Deserves Fruit – reminds me of the order of notes on a musical scale.

## **People Power**

Other people might help with memory strategies after brain injury and remembering. People could assist by:

- Not saying things like: “I already told you that” or “Don’t you remember ...”
- Patience and remembering it is the brain injury. It is not lazy, it is not deliberate forgetting.
- Encourage and support the person to ask, when they do not remember information.
- Repeat information as often as is necessary.

- Build on what the person has discovered helps prompt memory for them.
- Try and establish how memory is affected and use specific strategies to respond: e.g. if verbal memory is a problem then try using visual cues.
- Where possible prompt the person to try and recall before giving the information.
- Use prompts and questions to practice and promote memory and recall.
- Assist where needed to research, plan and utilize any memory support.
- Research memory aids that fit with the person's age and lifestyle (e.g. high technology use versus low technology).
- Support, educate and encourage correct use of any memory aids. Help develop structure & regular routines to reduce the demands on memory.

## **Reduce Fatigue**

Know your limits and act before cognitive fatigue is an issue. Fatigue can make all other functions worse. [For more tips see 'I'm So Tired My Brain Hurts' for more.](#)

## **Manage and minimize stress**

Notice what creates stress and when it occurs. Strategies that addresses stress before it happens are best but it may also be necessary to have strategies for when stress overpowers memory. [For more about meditation and mindfulness.](#)

## **Live a healthy lifestyle**

Eat well, regular exercise, adequate sleep, eliminate or minimize substances harmful to the brain such as alcohol and smoking.

## **Keep the brain active**

A [use it or lose it!](#) approach

# And Finally

Don't be afraid to be creative. Modify, change and make whatever tools, strategies, aids you use work for you. And in case you have found all these words over the past weeks just tooooooooooo much – this Infographic is a nice summary of our memory [How Memory Works](#).

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# How MEMORY works

Our memories give us a sense of self and make us who we are. However, our memories are more than just files in a filing cabinet. While your first day at school may seem like a single memory, it's actually a complex construction of multiple memories that span your brain.

Here's a look at how your memory works and how you can improve it.

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## 1 OVERVIEW

There are three stages to memory: encoding, storage and retrieval of information.

Most of memories are created by visual, acoustic and semantic encoding.

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## 2 THE MEMORY PROCESS

Brain cells work together in a network to process information. When one cell sends signals to another, the connection between them grows.

**ENCODING**  
A memory will only be made if information is encoded.

**STORAGE**  
A memory will only be made if information is encoded.

**RETRIEVAL**  
A memory will only be made if information is encoded.

**Forgetting**  
A memory will only be made if information is encoded.

**Repetition**  
A memory will only be made if information is encoded.

**Retrieval**  
A memory will only be made if information is encoded.

With each new experience, your brain renews and reorganizes itself slightly.

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## 3 COMMON CAUSES OF MEMORY LOSS

Memory loss can occur in words and thought patterns, and can also be present physically with the loss of motor memory. Memory loss is not always complete, sometimes failing to remember only a selected group of items.

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## 4 GOOD WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR MEMORY

HEALTHY BALANCED LIFESTYLE

**FOOD:** Matcha (Green Tea), Coffee, Grass-Fed Beef, Wild Salmon, Blueberries & Acid Berries, Cashews, Quinoa, Greek Yogurt, Eggs, Get Solid Rest.

**ACTIVITIES:** Engagement in Life & Surroundings, Listen To Music, Learn New Information, Quick Mental Exercises, Puzzle Games, Situate & Sketch.

**EXERCISE:** Regular Physical Activity, Short Walk Breaks, Take-Up New Sports & Hobbies.

High-powered brain foods provide sustained energy, thus they typically include complex carbohydrates, fiber, lean protein, and some fat. Brain foods also power your entire body, including the heart and vascular system, meaning they are low in cholesterol and saturated fat, high in omega-3 fatty acids and minimally processed.

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## 5 HOW TO APPLY THAT KNOWLEDGE

While memory tends to lapse with age, stress or poor health, there are ways to improve it through various strategies, mental exercises, and use of your surroundings.

- Drink in Moderation:** Alcohol affects the brain cells and their ability to function.
- Keep Moving:** Exercise helps to keep the brain and body healthy.
- Visualization & Association:** Attach images to words to assist in recall by linking to things already familiar.
- Name Games:** Repeat names to each other after hearing them to help long-term recall.
- Chunking:** Break things down into smaller parts making them easier to remember.
- Method of Loci:** Using locations or sequencing to remember things.
- Pay Attention:** Solid encoding requires proper focus and attention to surroundings and actions.
- Environment:** Use or manipulate your surroundings to assist in recall and provide visual stimulation and cues.
- Practice & Repetition:** Repetition of electrical patterns in the brain creates stronger memories and faster recall.

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**SOURCES:** science.howstuffworks.com, curiosity.discovery.com, dx.demon.com, wikipedia.org, brainready.com, zen.oh.gsu, brainstate.com, mindpower.com, aei.org

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