



The memory handbook

A practical guide to living with memory problems

For more information

alzheimers.org.uk

0333 150 3456





About this handbook

Memory loss can be frustrating and difficult to cope with. However, there are ways of managing the problems you're facing. This handbook is written for people with mild memory problems. It should give you some ideas and practical strategies to help with living well.

Many of the ideas in this booklet are suggestions from people who have problems with their memory. Everyone has their own way of coping, and what works for one person does not always work for another. Use the suggestions in this booklet to find what works for you. You might want to discuss some of the suggestions with friends and family.

If you have memory loss, you might also be having problems with things like organising, thinking clearly, concentrating, communicating or seeing things properly. Your symptoms may have resulted in a recent diagnosis of mild cognitive impairment (MCI), dementia or another condition such as depression, or functional cognitive disorder. You may not have a diagnosis at all, but might still be looking for ways to deal with memory problems.

If you would like to talk to someone about memory problems, see your GP or contact Alzheimer's Society.

For information, advice and support, call us on **0333 150 3456**. To find out what support is available in your area, go to **[alzheimers.org.uk/dementiadirectory](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/dementiadirectory)**

You will find lots of other information about dementia on the Society's website at **[alzheimers.org.uk](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk)**



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1

Understanding your memory

This section looks at the different types of memory, how we use our senses and how memory works.

Types of memory

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Memory is a very complex thing – there are several different types. You use these different types of memory when you do different things. It can help to know a little about them.

Working memory

You use this to store information for short periods. For example, working memory is needed to remember the numbers when you do a sum in your head.

If you have problems with your working memory you may take longer to figure something out. For example, you might need more time to pay at the supermarket till.



Losing focus

Memory loss can appear worse if you have problems with attention. If you are not able to focus on a task you may not be able to keep information in your mind. You may seem to forget, but you actually have lost focus.

Episodic memory

This is needed to recall past events – recent or distant. You use episodic memory when you remember personal experiences, such as what you had for lunch or when you attended a family gathering. These memories often include recalling emotions or feelings. Experiences that cause strong positive or negative feelings are easier to recall many years later.

If you are struggling to recall recent memories such as where you parked the car, you may have a problem with your episodic memory.

Semantic memory

You use this to remember the meanings of words or remember facts. You also use it to remember familiar faces or objects. This knowledge is not directly tied to any personal experience – for example, you may just ‘know’ a plate is for holding food or that a phone is used to talk to people far away.

If you have a problem with your semantic memory you may have difficulty finding the right words when you are talking to someone.

Prospective memory

You use this to remember appointments, dates or events that are due to happen in the future.

If you have a problem with your prospective memory you may forget to do something at a particular time. Or you may forget that you had planned something, such as visiting a friend.



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Using your senses

Your memory takes in information provided by your senses. Our five senses are:

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Sight



Smell



Taste



Touch



Hearing

You can recall information stored in your memory with or without the help of prompts from your senses. However, a prompt can often help.

Examples of prompts



A photograph of someone can prompt the memory of a forgotten name or evoke an emotion (**sight**).



A particular perfume can prompt the memory of someone special to you (**smell**).



The taste of a dish can prompt the memory of when you first ate it (**taste**).



The feeling of sand under your toes may evoke memories of a childhood holiday (**touch**).



A piece of music may bring back memories of when you first met someone special to you (**hearing**).



Types of memory

When you 'record' memory and then recall it, your mind goes through this process:

Receiving – You get a piece of information that is received through your five senses.

Encoding – Your brain converts this information into a form that can be stored. It is held in your short-term memory first.

Storing – You transfer some of the information from short-term memory into the storage of long-term memory. This can take anything from a few seconds to many months and can be helped by repeating it over and over again in your mind (known as 'rehearsal').

Retrieving – You recall the information stored in your long-term memory.

Memory problems can be caused by something going wrong at any of these stages. The way information is stored and retrieved can be very specific to the individual. It often depends on how important the information is to you, or if there is a strong emotion tied to the memory.

Try tackling memory problems even if you sometimes find it difficult. There are ways to help improve your memory and you may already use your own techniques for remembering things.



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2

Coping with memory problems

This section helps you to understand your difficulties with memory and looks at how you might feel about them. It also has suggestions for how to live well with memory problems.

Types of memory problems

Memory problems vary from person to person. What you consider to be a problem depends partly on what you need or expect to be able to do.

Some very common memory problems include:

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- forgetting people's names
- struggling to remember day-to-day events or experiences
- misplacing items (such as keys or glasses) around the house
- getting lost in a familiar place or on a familiar journey
- finding it hard to start or follow conversations
- forgetting appointments or important dates (such as birthdays)
- struggling with the steps in a recipe.



Memory problems and your feelings

Everyone reacts differently to memory problems. It's normal to get frustrated or worried, or lose self-confidence.

You may find the following tips helpful.

- Talk to others, such as friends, family or other people experiencing memory problems. They might have some helpful suggestions, and you may be able to find solutions together.
- Do the things that you're comfortable with.
- Start with the memory problems that are having the most impact on your life. For example, regularly misplacing items like a mobile phone or keys.
- Try to focus on the things you can remember and can do. You may well have a good memory of events from many years ago. There will still be many things you are able to do that you learned in the past.



'Try to live one day at a time and not worry what tomorrow will bring.'

Person living with mild cognitive impairment (MCI)



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Living with memory problems

Many people find the following approaches helpful. It's a good idea to try out different approaches and discover which ones work best for you.

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Build on the skills you still have

You will still have skills even if you have memory problems. For example, if you've always been an organiser and good at planning, make the most of this when facing new challenges.

A regular routine

Set up a regular daily routine. This will make it easier to remember what will happen over the course of the day. Include time to relax as part of the routine. Keep some variety and stimulation, such as meeting up with a friend or going out to the shops, so you don't get bored.

Timing

Don't be too hard on yourself if you find something more difficult than you used to. You could take some time out and come back to it again later, or think about different ways to manage the task. You could make a note to finish the task as a reminder to yourself later on.

Try to do the most challenging things at the time of day when you have the most energy and can concentrate best. Avoid them if you feel tired, anxious or unwell. Take your time.



Talk about your day

If you've been out for the day, talk to your partner, or a friend or family member afterwards about it. This is a good way of remembering and feeling positive about what you've done that day.

Plan ahead

Plan ahead to make your daily tasks more manageable. For example, put the things you'll need for the next day near the front door. You could put out your bag, your keys, and your wallet or purse. This will help you to remember to take these items with you.

One thing at a time

Try to do only one thing at a time. For example, if you're making a cup of tea, don't make a phone call at the same time. For a new task, repeat it and give yourself time to learn it.

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Small steps

Break tasks down into smaller steps. Then you can focus on just one step at a time. For example, if you're wet-shaving or washing your hair, set out the things you need in order then put each one aside once you've used it. Ask for help from others if you think you need it.

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One place for everything

Try to keep important items such as your keys, glasses, purse or wallet in the same place. This could be a large bowl somewhere obvious and visible (for example, by the telephone, near the front door, or on the coffee table). Then you can always find them easily.

Knowing where things are

Try to keep the layout of your home familiar so that you know where things are. Consider labelling drawers and cupboards with words or pictures of what's inside them. Remove any clutter or unnecessary items.

Distractions

If your environment is noisy or very busy, you will find it harder to remember things or concentrate. Your memory works much better with no distractions. Try to make your environment quiet and remove any unnecessary distractions.

Support

Talk to friends and family about how you feel and how you can work together. They can support you to try out new techniques to help with your memory.





Your next steps



If you have a diagnosis of dementia, it is a good idea to find out more about it, including information about what treatments are available. Speak to your GP or see booklet 872, **The dementia guide: Living well after your diagnosis.**



Talk to a family member or friend, or a professional such as a psychologist, about how you're feeling.



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Memory aids and tools

This section suggests aids that might help with different types of memory problems.

Aids to help with memory problems

People with memory problems have suggested some of the following aids to help remember things. You might think of them as different tools for tackling different problems. You may have already used some of them.

Look for aids that fit with the skills you already have. For example, if you have never used a reminder function on your mobile phone, you may find it difficult to start using it now.

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An occupational therapist (see **page 59**) can offer practical advice. For more expensive items, you might be able to ‘try before you buy’ – perhaps from an ‘assisted living’ shop on the high street or a disabled living centre. Contact your local authority for details of your nearest centre, or see the Disabled Living Foundation in **‘Other useful organisations’ on page 66**. If you are not able to see a product before buying it, there might be online videos which show people using and reviewing the item. Whatever aids you use, people around you can support you to use them.



Some of the daily living aids featured in this section are available from the Alzheimer’s Society online shop. Visit [alzheimers.org.uk/shop](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/shop)

Common memory aids

Calendar or diary

Put a calendar, wallchart or noticeboard in a place where you will see it frequently – on the fridge or by the telephone, for example. You could use a whiteboard to note activities or tasks for the day, and wipe them off as you do them.

A notebook or large ‘week to view’ diary can be helpful. You can write down things you want to remember, such as lists of things you need to do, or have done. Keep it somewhere easy to see, such as by the telephone or in a fixed place in the kitchen.

Get into a routine of checking a diary, calendar, noticeboard or whiteboard – perhaps when you wake up in the morning, every mealtime, or every time you make a drink.

Cross the day’s date off your calendar before you go to bed, so that you are certain about the date when you get up the next day.

Keep a journal

Write a few sentences or stick photos in a daily journal. You can look back in it to remind you what you have done or how you felt. A journal may also give you something to show others or to talk about. You could collect mementos of things you’ve done to add to the journal as reminders. For example, you could keep a receipt from a meal out, train tickets or a programme from an event.

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Calendar clock

You could use an automatic calendar clock. As well as showing the time, it will remind you of the date and day of the week.

Shopping list

Take a list when you go shopping. Cross things off as you put them into your basket. If you use the same shop regularly, it can be useful to write the list in the order of the shop's layout. A friend or family member might be able to help with this.

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At home, keep a list of items as they run out so you can keep track of what you need.

If you find it difficult to write, you could keep part of the packaging of items you've run out of. Or you could use a voice recorder to help remind you what you need to buy.

Contact numbers

Keep a list of important and emergency contact numbers by the phone – for example, the doctor, the police, utility companies, family members or your neighbours. See **page 32** for a list of useful contacts.

Leave your list by the phone or store the contacts in your mobile phone so that you have easy access to any professionals you might need to get in touch with.

Consider buying a phone that allows you to pre-programme your most commonly used numbers into it. Then you would only need to press one number, or a button with a photo on it, to call someone.



Other useful memory aids

Sticky notes

You can use sticky notes anywhere in your home to remind you to do a one-off task.

For example, you could:

- stick one on the freezer to remind you to take something out to defrost
- stick one on your bookshelf to remind you when you have to return a library book.

Once you have completed the task, it's important to throw the sticky note away. This way you won't accidentally remind yourself to do something you've already done. It also helps you to keep things tidy.

Permanent reminders

You can make more permanent signs, for example a laminated A4 sheet, to remind you of things you need to do regularly.

For example, you could:

- stick a sign to the inside of the front door to remind you to take your keys, purse, wallet or a shopping list with you
- have a sign by the sink reminding you to wash your hands before cooking
- keep a sign near the bin reminding you what day to leave it out for collection.



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Medication reminder box

This is sometimes called a dosette box and has different compartments for each day and times of the day. The compartments have spaces for a number of different tablets. With a quick look, you can see whether you have taken your tablets for that day. Some models can be set to remind you when to take your pills, with an alarm, vibration or flashing light.

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Your pharmacist can help you get a medication reminder box and put your tablets in the right compartments for you.

Colour codes

Try labelling or coding your keys so that each one is a different colour – you can buy coloured rubber key caps or rings for this. For example, your front door key could be red and your garage door could be green. If you live in a flat, the key to your building could be blue.

Electronic devices

There are a range of electronic devices that can be used to help with memory problems. Some of these are also known as ‘assistive technology’. Many people find that electronic devices can help with daily tasks and support them to remain independent.

Some devices will be easy to use, while others may take longer to get used to. You may need the support of friends, family or professionals to help you choose one and get the most out of it. There are benefits to using electronic devices once you’re comfortable with them.

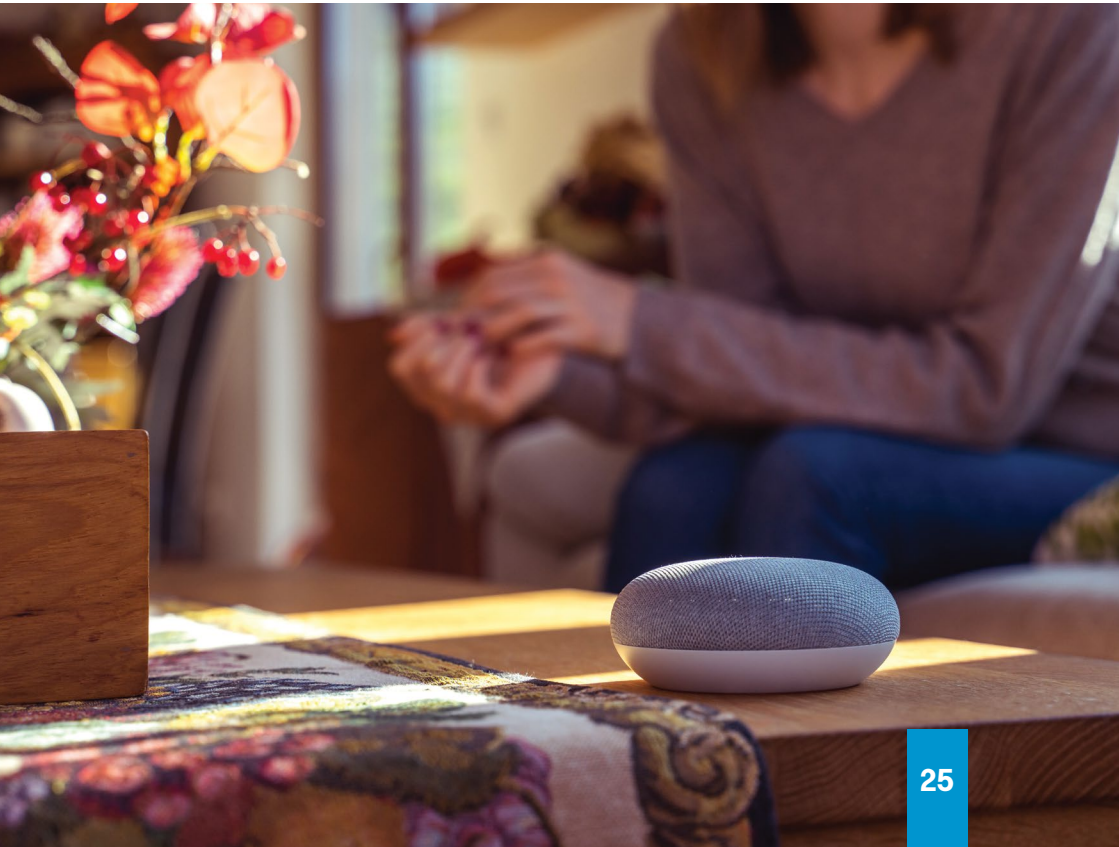


Smart devices

‘Smart’ devices like Amazon Echo, Google Home, and Apple HomePod can help you with memory problems. These are voice-activated devices that can answer questions or be set to notify you of tasks. For example, they can tell you the time and date if you ask, and can remind you when it is time to take medication.

These devices also have more advanced features, such as enabling you to add items to a shopping list or switching on the TV when a programme you want to watch is starting. You may need extra equipment for some of these tasks, and you also need to have wireless internet (Wi-Fi) in your home.

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Alarm clock

Use an alarm clock, a watch with an alarm, or a kitchen timer to remind you when you need to leave the house for an appointment, or when you have to check something cooking in the oven.

Write down why you have set the alarm, so you know why it is going off. Try to keep this reminder in a place that you're likely to notice, such as a whiteboard, calendar or diary.

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Mobile phones and smartphones

Mobile phones and smartphones both allow you to make calls and send texts. Smartphones generally have many more features, for instance being able to use email and 'apps' (see **page 29** for more information on these).

There are different ways to use both types of device to help you:

- The display screen of most mobile and smartphones shows you what day and date it is. You can also use the calendar function to remind you of the day and date.
- You can set reminders on both types of device. This means an alarm goes off at a certain time with a message reminding you about something you need to do. This could be a one-off event like meeting a friend for lunch, or a regular reminder that a TV programme is starting, or to take medication. Some TVs or service providers also have reminder features, so you can set a reminder to watch or record a programme.



- When you have booked a doctor or dentist appointment, for example, they may be able to send a text or email reminder to you. Ask the receptionist about this when you book.
- Most devices have a built-in voice recorder. Use this to record information that you need to remember. You could play it back later, or transfer reminders to a written calendar at the same time each day.
- Most smartphones and many mobile phones have cameras. You could take a picture of something to remind you, instead of having to write anything down.
- Most smartphones have the same ‘virtual assistants’ that are used in the smart devices mentioned on **page 25**. This means that you can ask them questions, arrange reminders, and use them in a very similar way.
- You can save a ‘favourites’ list when you shop online, making it easier to reorder each time.

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“ **The best advice is treat each day as it dawns. Don’t try and second-guess how you think you will be, just be the best you can be on that day!** ”

Person living with dementia



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Computer or tablet device

If you have a tablet device (such as an iPad) you can use functions such as reminders, notes or the calendar to help you.

Most email accounts have calendar and to-do list features that you can check.

You might need to put a sticky note or label on your computer to remind you to turn it on and check your daily list.

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These include:

- calendars
- reminders
- shopping lists.



Apps

If you have a smartphone or tablet device there are a range of applications (known as ‘apps’) that you might find useful. These include electronic versions of most of the memory aids mentioned on [page 26](#) as well as many others, such as:

- maps
- apps for life story work (a personal record of experiences, people and places in your life)
- apps for relaxation exercises and mindfulness – a technique that can help people manage their mental health or gain more enjoyment from life.

You can download apps from the internet (through a ‘store’ such as the App Store or Google Play) and use them for specific tasks. For example, you could use a medication reminder app to prompt you to take your pills, and which medicine to take. Some apps will be free, while you will need to pay for others.

There are lots of different apps available and you may want to try different ones to see if they work for you. Some apps have a free version which you can try before buying the full app.



Prompt and reminder devices

These are devices that detect movement nearby and can be placed near a door. You can set the device to play a voice message as a prompt for your memory when you approach. For example, it could go near your front door, to remind you to lock up when you go out, or to take your keys with you. Or you could have one near the kitchen door to remind you to check that you have switched the oven off.

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Other kinds of reminder devices work in a similar way to smart devices and can automatically play a preset message at a certain time. For example, if you go shopping at 9.30am on a Tuesday, you can record a message reminding you to take your shopping list and bags with you at this time.

Locator devices

You can use these to help you find frequently mislaid items such as keys or a wallet. You attach a small electronic tag to the item. If you mislay it, you click a button on the locator device to make the tag beep. You will need to keep the locator device somewhere obvious (see **'One place for everything' on page 16**). Your friends and family may also find these useful.





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Helpcards

Helpcards can make it easier to get help or assistance when you're out in the community. They are the size of a credit card and are easy to carry with you. They include a box on the front for you to record what you might need help with, and space on the back for details of someone who can be contacted in an emergency. To order a free helpcard call us on **0300 303 5933** or fill out our online form – alzheimers.org.uk/form/order-free-publications

A list of useful contact numbers

Make a list of contact numbers and keep it near your phone, so that you have easy access to any professionals you might need to get in touch with. Your list could include, for example:

- doctor/GP surgery
- community/district nurse
- memory assessment service or community mental health team
- social services (adult social care)
- care agency
- chemist/pharmacy
- dentist
- optician
- occupational therapist
- dementia adviser
- others (including important personal and emergency contacts).

3





Your next steps



Look into the different kinds of memory aids that are available and see if any might work for you.



Talk to friends and family about which aids you might use. Plan together how you're going to use the aid and ask for their help. Focus on learning to use one aid at a time.

**Remember!
Switch the hob
rings off!**



4

Memory strategies

There are many different strategies you could try to help you cope with memory problems. Some of these strategies involve picturing things in your mind and some use words or rhymes.

People remember things in different ways. This means some strategies will work better for some people. Try them out and see which ones work best for you.



A problem-solving approach

When applying strategies for remembering things, you might find it helpful to follow these steps:

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1. Identify the problem.

Example: 'I sometimes forget people's names.'

2. Decide how much it matters to you.

Example: 'It happens a lot. It can be embarrassing'. (It may be that some things matter a great deal, like forgetting a close friend's name. But will it really matter much if you forget the name of a celebrity who you're unlikely to meet?)

3. Think about how you might help yourself.

Example: 'I could carry a small photo album with people's names next to their photos or save them as contacts with photos in my mobile phone. Or I could tell people I'm a bit forgetful, ask for their name, and then repeat it in conversation.' (Other examples are given on the following pages).

4. Practise your strategies and see what works for you.

Rehearse your strategies with a close friend or partner. They can support you to learn. You will then feel more confident when you go out.

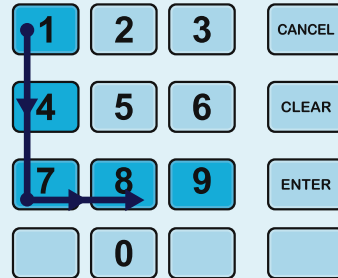
Using mental pictures

Learning new things

Some people can picture things and places in their mind to learn and remember:

- facts
- how to do something new
- how to do routine actions.

How can you remember a PIN so that you can get money from a cash machine? Imagine the numbers making a letter or shape on the number pad: For example **1478** makes the shape of an L.



4

Remembering someone's name

You could try making a picture in your mind from something in the person's name. For example:

- for Natasha **Singh**, you could imagine a girl **singing**
- for Neil Holly, you could imagine a man **kneeling** down and waving a piece of **holly**.

You can have a lot of fun with these kinds of reminders. The more funny or unusual they are, the more likely you are to remember them.



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You could link the person's most prominent feature with your mental picture of them. Glasses, long curly hair, or something they often wear (such as a particular hat or jumper) could be good things to focus on.

You could also try linking the person with other people who have the same name – for example, 'This person has the same name as my favourite film star, Charlie.'

Try these helpful tips:

- When picturing images in your mind, try to physically be in the place where you need to remember it.
- Practise using the image. It will help you learn and remember it.
- Describe or draw your images in a notebook. This will help you to remember them and you will have something to refer to if you forget some of them.
- Tell someone else the strategies you're using. If you can't remember which technique this is or how to use it, they can prompt you.

For help with remembering health professionals who visit you, you could use Alzheimer's Society publication 923, **My appointments**. This provides a written record to remind you of their names, job roles and what was discussed.





Jogging your memory

Working memory (see [page 6](#)) struggles the most when it is under pressure. Calmly try the following suggestions to jog your memory in different situations:

Situation	Strategy for jogging your memory
You losing something at home.	Try picturing yourself when you used it last and visualise where you put it down.
You go into a room and you're not able to remember why you went there.	Try to picture where you were when you decided to go to the room. Retracing your footsteps in person (or in your mind) can help you to recover your train of thought.
You prepare food and you're not able to remember the ingredients you need.	Try picturing yourself cooking the food and using all the ingredients you need for that particular dish. Going through the alphabet can help you remember names of different ingredients.

Using words and rhymes

Words and rhymes can also help you to remember people's names.

Try thinking of words that start with the same letter as the person's name:

Pleasant Peter
Funny Fiona

Pretty Penny
Smiley Sunita

You could also think of words that rhyme with the person's name:

Tall Paul
Merry Terry

Jolly Molly
Carer Sarah

Some people make up their own rhymes, songs or sayings to help them remember facts and numbers. Here are some techniques people told us they use:

- Betty found it difficult to remember the registration number of her car, which was YY51 FHT.

She made up this humorous sentence:

Why, Why (have I got) **51 Funny Happy Toes?**



YY51 FHT





You might be able to think of a word where the initials stand for a set of actions you have to remember.

- When Jean arrived home, she had to open the front door, switch off the alarm and then press a **'zapper'** to close the electric garage door. She found it difficult to remember the zapper, so the garage door was often left open.

Jean hung a **DAZ** washing powder packet by her front door to remind her of the procedure:

Door **A**larm **Z**apper

- Harry always forgot to close the front gate when he got home. He made up the word **GLO** to help him remember:

Gate **L**ock car door **O**pen front door

It can help if you picture yourself carrying out the sequence of actions in your head.

A joke or funny phrase might also help you to remember. For example:

- Jean **DAZZLED** herself every time she zapped the garage door!
- Harry felt a **GLO** of pride as he remembered to lock the gate!

Use any reminder that works for you – it doesn't matter how odd it may seem to someone else.





Your next steps



Try some of these approaches for coping with memory loss.



See if other people can help you with some of these strategies.



5

Staying healthy

Looking after your health will help with your memory day to day and in the long run.

Physical health

Just because you have dementia, doesn't mean you should feel unwell. Looking after your physical health can help with your memory.

- Try to eat balanced meals and drink plenty of fluids.
- If you smoke, try to give up, and drink alcohol in moderation (if at all). Your GP surgery will be able to give you support and advice about healthy levels of alcohol and about stopping smoking.
- Try to be physically active and do some kind of exercise several times a week for 30 minutes or more each time. A brisk walk, swimming, cycling or gardening all count.
- Consider joining a local exercise group or class such as a walking group, tai chi, dance, aerobics or yoga. Visit our online directory to see what is available where you live – go to [alzheimers.org.uk/dementiadirrectory](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/dementiadirrectory)
- Get enough sleep, preferably during the night-time (try to avoid long naps during the day).
- If you often feel low or irritable, you may be depressed. There are treatments for depression and anxiety so see your GP if it continues or gets worse.
- Get your sight and hearing checked regularly. If you need a hearing aid, wear it, check the batteries and keep it clean. If you wear glasses, make sure they fit comfortably and keep them clean.

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- See the dentist regularly and maintain good mouth hygiene.
- Pay attention to foot care and make sure your shoes and slippers fit well.
- Ask your GP about vaccines, such as for coronavirus, flu, pneumonia (for over-65s) and shingles (for over-70s).



5

Mental health

Keep your brain active

Keeping your brain active may help you retain your memory and other mental abilities for longer. Could you learn a new hobby? There are lots of ways to exercise your mind, including:

- reading
- keeping a diary
- doing puzzles or quizzes
- playing card games or board games.

Find ways to deal with stress and worry

It's common for people to become worried when they have memory problems. This makes it even harder to remember a person's name or what you were doing. The following tips may help you to manage stress or worry:

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- Talking about problems can help. Try sharing your problems with someone you trust. They will likely welcome your trust and you may feel better just for taking some action. Friends or family may suggest solutions you hadn't thought about.
- Try to maintain a healthy diet and keep physically and socially active as this can help with mental health as well as physical health.
- Complementary and alternative therapies such as aromatherapy, acupuncture and massage therapy may be helpful. Speak to your GP before trying any of these.
- It is important to be able to relax.



How to relax and reduce stress

There are many different exercises and techniques you can practise to help you relax and reduce stress. Here are some of the more popular ones.

You can sometimes combine these. Try some to see what works for you.

- **Mindful breathing** – where you sit with your eyes closed and just focus on breathing in and out, and how this feels. When your mind wanders, you gently bring your focus back to your breathing.
- **Progressive muscle relaxation** – where you lie down and then tense, hold and relax different muscle groups in your body, in turn from your head to your toes (hands, arms, neck, and so on).
- **Creative activities** – things like painting, playing an instrument, colouring books for adults and craftwork can all be pleasurable, relaxing and give a real sense of achievement.

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**‘A sense of humour really helps.
Laughter really is the best medicine.’**

Person living with mild cognitive impairment (MCI)



For more help and advice call our Dementia
Connect support line on **0333 150 3456**

- **Guided imagery** – where you visualise yourself being somewhere safe and restful, and imagine experiencing all the sights, sounds and smells.
- **Meditation or prayer** – taking time to meditate or pray can have physical, mental and emotional benefits.
- **Playing games** – simple card games (like Patience), crosswords, or games on your smartphone or tablet can all be good ways to relax.
- **Listening to relaxing music (or sounds such as waves)** – you can get a relaxation CD from your library, a shop or online. You can also download relaxation music to a smartphone or tablet.
- **Singing** – singing your favourite songs can be a good way to relax. Make a ‘playlist’ of your favourite music which cheers you up or calms you down.

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You will need instructions to learn most of the exercises. Ask your GP, look online (for example the NHS website has detailed information about breathing techniques) or visit your local library or bookshop (they may have a ‘wellbeing’ or ‘self-help’ section). You can try searching for videos online, or get specific apps for your smartphone or tablet to help with relaxation. You can find these at the NHS App Library or AcToDementia websites. (see ‘**Other useful organisations**’ on page 66)

If you have a diagnosis of dementia, you can find more information on how to live well with the condition in booklet 872, **The dementia guide: Living well after your diagnosis.**



Staying socially active

Staying socially active can also help with your memory.

- Keep seeing friends and family even if memory problems leave you feeling less confident.
- Try to get out and about if you can, and talk to people. If that isn't possible, video calling on your computer, smartphone or tablet can help you stay connected.
- Find out if there is a local dementia café or memory café you can attend. Search for services in your area at [alzheimers.org.uk/dementiadirectory](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/dementiadirectory)
- If you go to a place of worship, community group or activity, continue to attend this regularly. Consider volunteering. It can help you to stay socially and physically active and it can be good for your physical and mental health. Find out more at [alzheimers.org.uk/volunteer](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/volunteer)

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Everyday activities

- Try to manage your time so you can get everything done. It can help to do the most important things first and come back to other things later. Plan breaks in between tasks so you can rest.
- Give yourself time for hobbies – for example, reading, singing, swimming or meeting friends.
- Try keeping a ‘wish list’ of things that you would like to do, such as a trip to the cinema, theatre, a football match or a local place of interest. Try to make sure that you do something from your wish list once a week to help maintain a sense of wellbeing.

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‘I volunteer at the local Alzheimer’s Society, and hopefully this helps to keep my brain working. Just because we have memory problems doesn’t mean we can’t help other people in some way.’

Person living with mild cognitive impairment (MCI)



Sleep and sleep routines

Sleep is essential to good physical and mental health and wellbeing. Sleep also plays an important role in memory and learning. Research suggests that sleep helps you to store new memories in your brain over time. Sleep can also help with 'cognitive' processes (for example, thinking and problem-solving).

There are many reasons why you might have trouble getting to sleep or find that your sleep pattern varies. If you have trouble sleeping, the following suggestions may help:

- Set the alarm for the same time every morning and get up when it goes off. Do this whether or not you feel you have had a good night's sleep. It will help your body to develop a regular sleep pattern.
- Being more active and going outside during daylight can help. See '**Physical health**' on page 46 for more information.
- Avoid long daytime naps. If you do need one, keep it to 30 minutes at most and no later in the day than early afternoon.
- Avoid tea, coffee, cola and cocoa from lunchtime onwards. These are stimulants and can keep you awake. Try caffeine free varieties.



- Avoid eating a heavy meal or drinking too much fluid in the evening. Digesting a meal can keep you awake, or you might wake up to go to the toilet.
- Don't drink alcohol before going to bed.
- Try not to do anything that needs a lot of physical or mental energy – such as going for a run or Sudoku – during the hour before you go to bed. Otherwise, your body and mind will still be awake when you go to bed.
- Wait until you are sleepy before you lie down to go to sleep. Make sure the room is at a comfortable temperature and not too bright.
- Ideally your bedroom should be used only for sleeping in, or for sexual and physical intimacy. Don't use electronic devices, such as a television, radio, phone or tablet in the bedroom. Try not to eat or read in bed.
- If you don't fall asleep within about 10 minutes, get up and go to another room. You may wish to use a night-light. Do something relaxing in the other room and only go back to bed when you feel sleepy. You may find that you have to do this more than once a night.
- An activity tracker can help you understand more about your sleep patterns and the type of sleep you are getting. This can help you to develop better sleep routines.

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Your next steps



Find ways to be physically, mentally and socially active, eat a balanced diet and reduce your alcohol intake.



Try to get enough sleep and if you are having problems, talk to your GP.



For more information see factsheet 534, **Understanding sleep problems, night-time disturbance and dementia.**





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Services and support

You do not have to face memory difficulties on your own. There are lots of people who can support you and help you to stay active and independent. They might be friends, family or professionals. Help is available and it's OK to ask for it.

Family and friends

Remember that the memory loss is not your fault. It is due to changes in your brain. Work with those around you to cope better with memory problems. Ask them to read through this handbook with you.

Family and friends can support you by:

- talking about how you are feeling
- helping you identify and achieve the things that are important to you
- not 'testing' you – for example, by asking you, 'Do you remember who this is?'
- being sensitive and supportive if they need to repeat any information they have already told you
- reinforcing approaches and strategies you are trying
- supporting you to do things, not doing them all for you – for example, reminding you about the calendar clock if you ask 'What day is it?', rather than just telling you the day.



Professionals

Many professionals can help you live well with memory difficulties. Ask your GP if you think you need to see one of them, especially if memory problems are affecting your daily life. You may be able to self-refer for talking therapies.

Occupational therapists can work with you to help you with daily life and personal care. They can support you to continue doing daily activities that are important to you, and can give advice on memory aids and coping strategies.

Psychologists can help you with depression or anxiety, and coming to terms with memory loss or a diagnosis of dementia. Talking to a trained professional may help you feel less stressed or unhappy.

Clinical, counselling and health psychologists can also help you to understand which areas of your memory are being affected, and help you develop coping strategies. Make sure that any psychologist is registered with the Health and Care Professions Council. (see '**Other useful organisations**' on page 66).

Speech and language therapists can help you and those close to you to communicate better. They can also help you with memory aids and strategies that use language, and provide tailored advice.

Speak to your local pharmacist if you need help to remember to take your drugs. They may have equipment to help you with this, such as alarmed medication boxes.





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If you have a dementia diagnosis you may find that talking to other people with dementia is helpful. For support at any time of day or night join our online community, Talking Point – go to alzheimer.org.uk/talkingpoint

Structured approaches

There are some structured approaches to help with memory loss and dementia. Ask professionals whether these are available in your area. You may benefit from trying a number of different approaches as some approaches may be more beneficial for you than others. Your GP, memory service or community mental health team can help.

Cognitive rehabilitation

Cognitive rehabilitation focuses entirely on what is important to you personally and what would make a positive difference to your everyday life. A professional such as a psychologist, occupational therapist or speech and language therapist will work with you (and in some cases someone close to you) to find out what specifically would make your life easier or more enjoyable.

Memory difficulties can have an impact on daily life in many ways, but there is plenty of evidence that cognitive rehabilitation can help you to meet your goals and cope better with memory problems. It can also help you to think about the skills, abilities and knowledge you still have. It works by getting you to use the parts of your brain that are working well to help the parts that are not.

This could be by learning to use a mobile phone or by relearning a life skill such as cooking. You could also change or adapt your home. The professional helping you will know a lot about memory difficulties and will suggest the best solution for you, working with you to help you achieve an agreed goal.



Cognitive stimulation therapy

Cognitive stimulation therapy (CST) aims to improve your mental abilities by keeping your brain active. This is done through a series of themed activity sessions carried out over several weeks. One session, for example, might involve doing word puzzles or talking about current affairs. Then in another session you could be playing an instrument along to music. CST also includes elements of reminiscence (see below).

After the first set of sessions, you may be offered maintenance CST (less frequent 'top-up' sessions) to keep the benefits going. There is evidence that approaches such as CST improve mental abilities and quality of life for people with memory loss.

Life story work and reminiscence

Life story work is where you use a scrapbook, photo album or app on your smartphone or tablet to remember and record details of your life. These could be your experiences, values or beliefs. Life story work is usually a joint activity for you and a family member, friend or support worker.

Reminiscence involves talking about things from your past, using prompts such as photos, familiar objects or music. It can help you see your life as a whole and recognise your experiences and achievements.



Sometimes these approaches are combined using a memory box of favourite possessions or memorabilia. Many people find techniques like this helpful because they draw on your earlier memories, which you tend to retain for longer.

By talking about who you are, it can help you and others to focus on yourself as someone with an interesting and varied life who still has skills and interests, rather than only on your current memory problems.



Your next steps



Consider creating a record of the important things in your life. You can record memories of experiences, people and places in a book, photo album, app or folder.



Talk to family and friends about strategies you can use to help with your memory problems.



Speak to a professional about strategies and techniques that may help you.

Alzheimer's Society support services

We provide a range of services and resources to support people affected by dementia.

Support services

Alzheimer's Society's Dementia Connect service provides a range of information, advice and support to anyone affected by dementia in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. You can reach us online, on the phone and face to face.

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Online

Visit [alzheimers.org.uk/get-support](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support) for online advice and support whenever you need. Here, you'll find information on any aspect of dementia and the option to download or order what you need from our wide range of publications.

You can also connect to others affected by dementia on our online community Talking Point at [alzheimers.org.uk/talkingpoint](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/talkingpoint) and search for services in your area using our dementia directory at [alzheimers.org.uk/dementiadirctory](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/dementiadirctory)





Phone

You can contact our Dementia Connect support line by calling **0333 150 3456** seven days a week. If you speak Welsh, call our Welsh-speaking support line on **03300 947 400**. Our dementia advisers are available to tackle problems, share advice and practical information or simply provide a listening ear. They can send out information that's right for you via email or post and connect you to help in your local area.

Alzheimer's Society offers a Lasting power of attorney digital assistance service to help people with dementia create LPAs online. If you don't have access to the internet, we can help you to create an LPA through a series of telephone appointments. Please note that we do not provide legal advice. Call us on **0333 150 3456**.



Face-to-face services

Our trained staff and volunteers can connect and signpost you to practical advice, support and information in your local area. This includes face-to-face services when these are available. They can make things easier and help you continue doing things that are important to you.

We also oversee support groups that meet in person and sometimes via video or phone. These include Singing for the Brain®, peer support for people with dementia, and information and support groups for carers.



For more help and advice call our Dementia Connect support line on **0333 150 3456**

Other useful organisations

There are lots of other organisations that can offer help and support with the issues covered in this guide. Some of these are listed below.

AcTo Dementia

www.actodementia.com

AcTo Dementia is a website that gives independent recommendations and advice on touchscreen apps designed for people living with dementia.

Age UK

0800 678 1602 (advice line, 8am–7pm)

www.ageuk.org.uk

Wales – Age Cymru

0300 303 44 98 (advice line, 9am–4pm Monday–Friday)

advice@agecymru.org.uk

www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru

Northern Ireland – Age NI

0808 808 7575 (9am–5pm Monday–Friday)

advice@ageni.org

www.ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland

Age UK, Age Cymru and Age NI provide information and advice to help people know their rights and make the best choices for later life.



British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

01455 883300 (10am–4pm Monday–Friday)

bacp@bacp.co.uk

www.bacp.co.uk

BACP represents counsellors and psychotherapists and can provide a list of counsellors and psychotherapists in your area.

The British Psychological Society (BPS)

0116 254 9568

info@bps.org.uk

www.bps.org.uk

The British Psychological Society can provide a list of chartered psychologists who offer private therapy services. Members of The Faculty of the Psychology of Older People (FPOP), which is part of the BPS, work with people in their own homes, hospitals, care homes and GP surgeries.

Disabled Living Foundation (DLF)

0300 999 0004 (helpline, 9am–5pm Monday–Friday)

info@dlf.org.uk

www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk

The Disabled Living Foundation provides impartial advice, information and training on independent living.



Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)

0300 500 6184

www.hcpc-uk.org

The Health and Care Professions Council regulates health and care professions in the UK.

Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT)

020 3141 4600

hello@rcot.co.uk

www.rcot.co.uk

The Royal College of Occupational Therapists provides details of independent occupational therapists in your local area.

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT)

020 7378 1200 (8am–5pm Monday–Friday)

www.rcslt.org

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The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists is the professional body for speech and language therapists in the UK. It provides information about speech and language therapy.



Our information is based on evidence and need, and is regularly updated using quality-controlled processes. It is reviewed by experts in health and social care and people affected by memory problems.

This booklet can be downloaded from our website at **alzheimers.org.uk/memoryhandbook**

To give feedback on this publication, or for a list of sources, please email **publications@alzheimers.org.uk**

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Alzheimer's Society is the UK's leading dementia charity. We provide information and support, improve care, fund research, and create lasting change for people affected by dementia.

If you have any concerns about Alzheimer's disease or any other form of dementia, visit alzheimers.org.uk or call our **Dementia Connect support line** on **0333 150 3456**. (Interpreters are available in any language. Calls may be recorded or monitored for training and evaluation purposes.)



People affected by dementia need our support more than ever. With your help we can continue to provide the vital services, information and advice they need. To make a single or monthly donation, please call us on **0330 333 0804** or go to alzheimers.org.uk/donate



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