

## Improve your memory

### Memory Tips and Recall Techniques

Memory plays an essential role in everyday life, enabling us to learn about the world around us and adapt accordingly. We use memory in every moment, whether it be for remembering peoples' first names, studying for exam, or countless other aspects of our life.

Information we take in goes through the three stages of memory: **encoding**, **storage**, and **retrieval**.

The **encoding** process converts information into a construct stored in the brain. Then the information is **stored** as either a long-term memory or short-term memory. Finally, information is available to be retrieved from storage.

There are several ways to facilitate this process, protect against memory decline, and enhance our ability to retain information. Below, we outline strategies for boosting brain health, as well as specific techniques for memorizing and recalling information.

### Tips for Memory Improvement

The best way to protect and improve memory is by making good lifestyle choices: exercising regularly, limiting stress, eating healthfully, and getting enough sleep. You can also keep the mind agile by learning a foreign language or playing brain training games to improve thinking skills and short-term memory.

- **Exercise regularly:** Exercise is one of the best things you can do to protect your memory. Regular aerobic exercise (cardio) appears to boost the size of the hippocampus, the area of the brain involved in verbal memory and learning. Regular exercise can also help you maintain a healthy weight, reduce stress, and sleep better, all of which are related to memory.
- **Limit stress:** Meditation and mindfulness are also great ways to reduce stress and improve sleep. Meditation has been shown to improve episodic memory, the memory of everyday events.
- **Be conscious of what you consume:** Not surprisingly, what you put into your body can also affect your memory. Consuming a balanced diet that includes healthy fats and natural sugar (glucose)—and limits saturated fat, refined sugar, and alcohol—may be best for promoting long-term memory function.
- **Sleep:** Sleep is critical, as it plays a role in consolidating of memories. Also, a lack of sleep can impair an individual's ability to concentrate. You can improve sleep

by exercising regularly, engaging in mindfulness/meditation, and avoiding caffeine in the afternoon and evening.

## **8 Memory Techniques for Retaining Information**

When studying for an exam, preparing a presentation, or getting ready to deliver a speech, you will likely need to memorize information.

Before you start preparing, you can do several things to set yourself up for success. Try to avoid distractions while you're studying, plan ahead so you don't need to cram, and take study breaks. Evidence suggests that studying shortly before going to sleep, as well as sleeping between learning sessions, can help people retain information.

Below are **8 techniques for retaining information and improving recall and memory performance**.

### **1. Organize the information**

Start by outlining the information you will need to recall. Creating a detailed, but organized outline of the information allows you to highlight and focus on important concepts. A useful organization strategy is the **chunking method**, which breaks down large amounts of information into smaller, logical units that are easy to understand.

### **2. Make associations**

Creating associations by drawing on existing knowledge is another helpful way to memorize information. You can create mental images and connect with sounds, smells, and tastes to help encode memories. For example, if you want to remember that a client's name is Sandy, you might picture her walking along a beach.

### **3. Use visual cues**

Using visual tools such as concept maps, graphs, illustrations, and photos can be beneficial for learning. Graphs and charts also simplify information, making it easier to comprehend and later recall.

This method can be beneficial to visual learners, meaning individuals who better conceptualize information they can see. It's also a great technique for presenters who can use visuals in their slide deck as retrieval cues.

### **4. Create mnemonics**

Using mnemonic devices, such as acronyms, acrostics, and rhymes, is a good way to memorize information long-term. For example, do you remember what year Columbus landed in America? You likely do if you ever learned the rhyme, "In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue." So if you need to remember a series of numbers for work, you might consider coming up with a creative rhyme.

**5. Write it down**

It turns out that some things are just better done the old-fashioned way. Researchers have found that writing down information by hand is more effective than typing for learning concepts. Because it takes longer to write by hand, you are naturally forced to be more selective with what you write and focus only on the key information. In fact, less is more when it comes to note taking.

**6. Say it out loud**

When you need to remember new information, it's helpful to read it aloud. One study determined that the dual action of speaking and hearing ourselves talk helps get words and phrases into long-term memory. This study, among others, confirms that memory benefits from active involvement.

**7. Engage in active recall**

Testing yourself forces you to pull information from your memory. Flashcards are a great way to self-test. Studies show that retrieval practice can greatly enhance recollection than simply restudying materials. This is likely a very effective way to commit things to memory because of the significant extra effort involved.

**8. Rehearse**

Practice really does make perfect. Rehearse information over and over, either by writing it down or reading it aloud.

Studies suggest that spaced repetition—spacing out learning over a longer period of time—is a more effective way to memorize information than trying to “cram” a lot of information into your brain over a short period of time.

All of these memory techniques are not only backed up by science, but even memory champions can attest to their efficacy. Even if you aren't a memory athlete, these memorization techniques can help you at school or at work.