



CENTERSTONE

Wellness Program

The ABCs of improving your memory

Wouldn't it be nice to always remember the name of a new acquaintance? Maybe you can't remember where you placed your keys, check book or cordless phone. What if you could never again forget a friend's birthday?

Simply put, memory is the mental activity of recalling information you learned or experienced. The ability to remember is one of our most useful personal and professional tools. The bad news: not everyone has a photographic memory. The good news: memory is a skill, and with practice it can develop and improve. Using the ABCs of memory you can begin improving your memory today.

Active

Keeping an active lifestyle can ward off memory loss associated with aging. Regular aerobic exercise improves circulation throughout the body, including the brain. Exercise also makes you more alert and relaxed, which improves your ability to remember. Exercise reduces heart disease and keeps oxygen flowing to the brain.

Example: You should join in the fun when your children or grandchildren are playing. Being an active participant in any activity keeps your mind and body sharp and keeps life interesting. Consider taking a short walk through your neighborhood as a calming activity each morning.

Brain

Keep your brain active! Exercising the brain allows it to grow and encourages development of new nerve connections that can improve memory. Developing new mental skills challenge your brain. Complex mental skills are great for memory.

Example: Challenge your brain with puzzles and games is one way to keep your brain active and improve its physiological functioning. Learn a new hobby, skill or even a computer game. Consider learning a new language.

Create

Create mental images of things you need to remember. Use vivid and colorful images. Give your images three dimensions. Use all your senses to code or dress up information. Create sounds, smells, touch or movements of items. The stronger you imagine and visualize a situation the more effectively it will stick in your mind for later recall.

Example: Perhaps you need to remember to pick up a get well gift for a friend. Create a beautiful and vivid image of exact colors and shapes of the special flowers or plant you have in mind. This will help you remember to complete your task.

Do it again

Repeat out loud or write down things you tend to forget. When learning a new task, repeatedly practice the task until it becomes part of your routine.

Example: To remember a new neighbor's name or a street address, repeat it to yourself several times. When taking a yoga class, repeat each new move until it becomes natural as opposed to something you're trying to replicate.

Eat and sleep well

A healthy diet contributes to a healthy brain. Eat foods containing antioxidants. Broccoli, blueberries and spinach are great examples. B vitamins, thiamin, vitamin E, niacin, folic acid and omega-3 fatty acids also seem to promote healthy brain functioning. Sleep also affects the brain's ability to recall recently learned information. Without a minimum of seven hours of sleep per night our ability to concentrate is minimized.

Example: Check the labels of foods you buy. If you can't pronounce most of the ingredients, there may be a healthier and more natural option. Visit your local farmer's market and learn about seasonal items available in your area. Invest in the best bedding you can afford and your overall memory (and health) will improve.

Fix the mess

Get organized! Fix the messes in your life. Clean up excess clutter and stress. Chronic stress can make concentrating and remembering much more difficult. Chronic stress changes your brain which affects your health and memory. It is best to learn to control stress. Clean up parts of your life that cause unnecessary stress or demands.

Example: Keep items you need frequently (keys or eyeglasses) in the same place. Organizing the physical space in your home reduces stress and helps with memory recall.

Group things together

Memory works by association. Memory is very similar to a filing system. Just like everything in a filing cabinet, everything in your long term memory must first be identified through your sensory or short term memory, then organized and filed for retrieval at a later date.

Example: When writing a grocery list, group items together in categories based on their location in the store. Group produce, dairy and frozen items together on your list.

Centerstone (615) 460-HELP (4357)

About Centerstone

Centerstone (www.centerstone.org), a not-for-profit organization is the nation's largest provider of community-based behavioral healthcare. With a history that spans over fifty years, Centerstone provides a full range of behavioral health and related educational services to more than 69,000 individuals of all ages and their families annually. Children, adolescents, adults, seniors, and families all receive help from a multitude of different programs in more than 120 facilities and 150 partnership locations in Tennessee and Indiana. Centerstone is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) in Tennessee and The Joint Commission in Indiana. For more information about Centerstone, please call toll free at (888) 291-4357.

About Susan Gillpatrick, MEd, LPC, CTS

Susan Gillpatrick, Centerstone Crisis Management Specialist, primarily works in the field with clients in critical incident response situations, and in Centerstone's wellness trainings and presentations. She is also responsible for planning and implementing marketing and growth strategies for Centerstone's Crisis Management Strategies.

In recent years, Ms. Gillpatrick worked for the Shelby County Government Victims Assistance Center in Memphis. There, she co-developed a model program for the state of Tennessee entitled, "Homicide Response." Her work in this area received the 2000 Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties.

Ms. Gillpatrick is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified Trauma Specialist, Certified Workplace Conflict Mediator, and Mental Health Service Provider in the state of Tennessee and a National Certified Counselor. She is also a member the American Counseling Association, the Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists, the Tennessee Mental Health Counseling Association, and the Middle Tennessee Employee Assistance Professionals Association. She is a frequent presenter at local and national conferences, and has had numerous articles published. She received her Master of Education degree in Human Development Counseling from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University.