

Feeling forgetful? Age-proof your memory

Prevention magazine shares tips to keep your mind quick and nimble

Prevention

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Did you lose your car keys again? Forget to buy something at the grocery store? It's frustrating, and as we age, it happens to all of us. But there's good news: Research has found that 70 percent of our risk of developing memory-affecting diseases like Alzheimer's is based on factors we *can* control — such as diet, fitness and stress levels. And keeping your brain active can have the same effect on your mind as a workout can on your body.

Some things to keep "in mind":

Reduce stress

Breathe deeply. Processing new information when we're anxious is tough. The stress itself is a distraction. Try this relaxation technique:

- Close your eyes, touch your pinky fingers to your thumbs, and think about that healthy feeling after a good workout. Take deep breaths and hold that thought for 30 seconds. For your middle finger, recall a caring gesture, and for your index finger, imagine a beautiful place. Daydream to reduce stress.

Sleep eight hours a night

Your brain needs sleep to function properly. It uses the down time to sort and store info. New research shows it also helps with recall.

Get regular exercise

- A Harvard Health Watch study found that for every mile a woman walked each day, her risk of cognitive decline dropped by 13 percent.
- A University of Illinois study showed that cardio actually increased the volume of the brain (creating new neurons or cells) and white matter (connections between neurons) in the frontal lobes, which contribute to attention and memory processing.

Cross-train your brain. Do something new every week.

It's not enough to do a crossword puzzle daily; you need to shake it up. Find 20 minutes, four times a week to do a *variety* of mentally stimulating activities.

- Switch the newspaper that you read.
- Learn a new function on your cell phone.
- Drive a different route to work, even talk to a new person.
- Do Sudoku.
- Play online brain games.

Feed your brain

Research has proven that "brain food" can improve short-term memory. Here's what you should eat to feed your brain:

- Blueberries: Have a cup a day.
- Fatty fish, like salmon, with omega-3s. Research has shown that they actually grow brain cells!
- Increase your intake of fruits, vegetables. All help protect and nourish brain cells.
- Cut saturated fat to keep heart strong and pumping blood to your head.
- Rosemary and turmeric have also been shown to stimulate the brain — add a pinch of each three times a day into your food.