

# Tips for an Amazing Memory

Do you keep forgetting that thingimy, what's-her-name, password, birthday, appointment? Don't despair, you're not losing your mind. **Caroline Robertson** shows you some simple strategies that will turn your brain from muddle-headed into a memorising marvel.

If "memory is the mother of all wisdom," as philosopher Aeschylus said, then forgetfulness is the foundation of many problems. A good memory matters because it's the repository of our experiences and insights. Confidence comes from clear thinking whereas fuzzy focus makes us fumble.

Memory loss isn't an inevitable part of ageing unless one suffers diseases such as dementia. An average memory improves every day, with attention. Just reading this fires fresh

neurons in your mind. If we use it we won't lose it as our brain grows up to 1,000 neurons a day, constantly creating new neural pathways.

Memory is like a muscle that can be trained to carry information. Even top memorisers exercise their minds every day. "Start simple and remember it's fun because you're using creativity and imagination," says Brad Zupp, member of the USA team at World Memory Championships. A better memory is just a matter of

perseverance and practice. As eight-time World Memory Champion Dominic O'Brien, who was dyslexic as a child, insists, if he can develop an incredible memory, you can too.

*Caroline Robertson is an author, naturopath and Ayurvedic practitioner. She offers courses, consultations, retreats and guided meditations. See [carolinerobertson.com.au](http://carolinerobertson.com.au)*

*For more about Brad Zupp, see [featsofmemory.com](http://featsofmemory.com)*

## 1 Organise outside

Where are my glasses, keys, remote, phone, wallet? Sound familiar?

Avoid panic of misplaced items by designating a special place for them at home and away. Relieve information overload by relying on reminder calendars or apps, lists, files and phone contacts. Notes and putting things in prominent places will draw your attention to what you need to notice. For example, place items to take out by the door, directly in your path.

## 2 Organise inside

Your mind is like a bag – well packed it holds heaps, poorly packed and it holds hardly anything. Break down information into groups then use your memory tricks to imprint them. For example, recite a phone number in chunks of numbers...0430 092 601. Categorise shopping into fruits, vegies, cleaning supplies, etc.

## 3 Mnemonic magic

Use mnemonic images, abbreviations or catchy rhymes such as '30 days hath September' or SCUBA for self-contained underwater breathing apparatus.

## 4 Six senses

The more silly and sensual cues you attribute to something, the more memorable it is. Linking of senses is called synesthesia. This is not only the key to information retention, but a world of imaginative fun. The more evocative you encode details, the more vivid they remain. For example, to imprint a name like Doug, see his memorable feature such as his

nose digging dirt smell it, taste it, hear the shovel, feel the grime under your fingernails. To remember that you parked your car at yellow 6B level, visualise a yellow car with six bees in its bonnet making a six shape. Look back at your car before leaving the area and note the route you'll take back to it with distinctive landmarks.

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## 5 PQRS (Preview, Question, Read, State and Test)

To access information for exams and presentations, this provides you with reliable retrieval cues under stress. It involves an overview of the information, asking questions then rereading to answer them, reading the material with highlighting and notes, answering questions out loud then testing yourself or enlisting someone to quiz you. A simpler approach is the four R's. Read (twice), record (write), revise (associate with something), recall (refresh it periodically).

## 6 Study skills

Only study for as long as you can concentrate. Shorter study sessions are more effective than long ones where your attention strays and your mind tires. Space sessions out to avoid cramming and revise information before sleep, so it sinks in. Favour a quiet, comfortable study site, free of distractions, sit straight and stretch regularly.

## 7 Brain gym

Rest and it rusts. Keep your mind muscle strong and forge fresh neural pathways by learning new things – conversation, crosswords, sudoku, scrabble, music and dance. Stay intellectually stimulated by exploring new environments, activities and people. Stretch both sides of your brain by using your nondominant hand to brush teeth and swing arms when you walk. Consciously conjure up past memories to the minutest detail.

## 8 Name game

It's embarrassing forgetting someone's name and impressive when you recall new acquaintances. When meeting someone – pause, pay attention, repeat the name, comment on it, register a strong characteristic of the person and try to associate it with their name. For example, Jill Brown. See her dressed as Jill from the nursery rhyme, her brown hair in braids, going up a hill. Or Mike Hammer could be holding a microphone and smashing it with a hammer. Use a rhyme or alliteration such as Starry Sarah and see her swinging from a star. Before events, review the names of people attending.

## 9 Location, location

An ancient memory method called loci involves memorising familiar settings such as your front gate, living room, kitchen, bedroom and placing things to recall there. Just say you need to remember milk, spanner, chair and water bill. See yourself spilling milk at the front gate, having to use a spanner to open the front door, tripping over a chair and having a hot bath.



## 10 **Calm and clear**

Multitasking is memory's enemy. Stress from too many tasks or information seriously impedes memory. A serene mind is like a still lake registering new information with deep ripples. A busy mind is like a choppy lake where new pebbles don't make a lasting impression. It takes approximately eight seconds to process information. Pause, breathe and encode it with sensual imagery or word mnemonics and it will be stored to access later. Stress and depression depletes memory, destroying brain cells and the hippocampus brain region where memories are stored and retrieved. Meditation improves memory by increasing creativity, concentration and thickening the cerebral cortex, creating connections between brain cells.

## 11 **Brain food**

Feed your mind with omega 3s from cold water fish, flax seed oil and walnuts. Antioxidants A, C, E, resveratrol and selenium from supplements, superfoods, green tea or fruit and vegetables protect the brain from free-radical ravaging B vitamins and zinc are vital to keep brain cells and synapses healthy.

## 12 **Brain drains**

Studies show diets high in saturated fat increase risk of dementia and decrease concentration and memory. A high-calorie diet also impairs cognition. Smoking starves the brain of essential oxygen, including cannabis, which impairs intelligence, attention span and memory according to the results of a long-term study, that followed over 1,000 people from birth to the age of 38.\* Also check that anemia or your medication isn't impairing your memory.

## 13 **Trigger happy**

Set up triggers by saying to yourself intentions such as "whenever I have my drink in the morning, I take my medicine".

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## 14 **Linking pegs**

Connect items with a story that puts them in a sequence. Then create pegs that you can place these items on to recall the correct order. For example, pegs for zero to 10 may be zero equals bow, one equals bun, two equals shoe, three equals tree, four equals door, five equals hive, six equals sticks, seven equals heaven, eight equals gate, nine equals lime, 10 equals pen. You can also turn numbers into shapes such as zero equals ring, one equals pencil, two equals snake, three equals aum, four equals sail, five equals seahorse, six equals golf club, seven equals boomerang, eight equals snowman, nine equals stringed balloon. Be relaxed and receptive to let these associations deeply emboss in your brain. Create a memorable form, smell, texture and sound to each item then use them to hang any items on for quick recollection. For example, using the pegs above, if you need to remember Flight 8367, you can see yourself walking through the gate climbing over a fallen tree, getting sticks stuck in your hair then arriving at heaven. If it was flight TG910, see Mr T painted bright green eating a lime and writing his autograph on you in pen. The stranger and stronger the story, the more evocative.

## 15 **Exercise**

Increase oxygen to the brain, encouraging brain cell cognition and growth with exercise, scalp massage, going upside down and deep breathing. Exercise encourages production of brain chemicals such as BDNF (brain-derived neurotrophic factor), which encourages growth of new nerve connections. Dr Kristine Yaffe at University of California found women who walked more had more cognitive and memory function.

## 16 **ASAP**

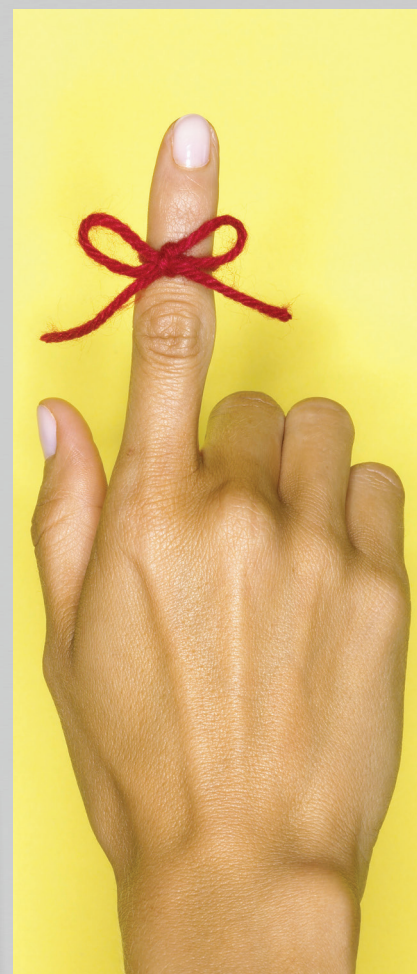
Don't put off 'til later what you can do now. If it's a top priority, pay it attention as soon as possible to minimise a memory lapse.

## 17 **Sleep deep**

Sleep makes memories absorb and refreshes brain function. Sleep deficit forms beta amyloid – a toxic protein that blocks the brain according to a study in the journal *Science*. "Disturbed sleep delays storage of memories and makes us forget sooner," says Professor Chris Idzikowski, director of The Edinburgh Sleep Centre.

## 18 **Memory mixes**

Brain boosting brahmi herb, as a tea or tablets, may improve cerebral circulation, memory and brain repair. The herb ginkgo biloba is another



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powerful memory aid. Essential oils that enhance recall include lavender, lemon, rosemary, sage, basil and brahmi.

## 19 **Laugh**

Laughter stimulates multiple brain regions promoting memory. As psychologist Daniel Goleman notes in his book *Emotional Intelligence*, "laughter... seems to help people think more broadly and associate more freely".

## 20 **Daily dedication**

Stretch your mind daily by playing memory games on the computer or with friends. As Cicero said, "Memory is the treasury and guardian of all things". Guard your memory and it will grant you an aware and alert life. **NH**



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