

EPILEPSY AND MEMORY

FACT SHEET



EPILEPSY AND MEMORY

Memory is our ability to process, store, retain and retrieve information and past experiences.

To form memories, you need to:

- Be able to concentrate.
- Pay attention.
- Filter out distractions.



How memory works

We have two types of memory – short-term and long-term.

- Short-term memory holds small amounts of information for just a short time – usually only 20 to 30 seconds.
- With repetition and conscious effort, this information can move into long-term memory, where it's stored for much longer.

You're more likely to remember things that:

- Are personal or meaningful
- Make sense to you
- Are linked to strong emotions
- Connect to something you already know

These connections help your brain hold onto the information more easily

Common problem areas

- Learning New Names – some tips for when you first meet someone:

Repeat their name immediately. Make a connection – My son's name is John. Confirm spelling – "is that spelt Jon or John?" Deliberately use the name in conversation such as "how long have you been playing the piano John?" Link the person's name with something that begins with the same letter "John likes juggling". If you are going to an event, maybe find out who will be there and rehearse their names in your head before meeting them.

- Remembering where you put things:

Pay attention as you are doing something. Where possible use the same location to place things. Visualise or retrace your steps.



Forgetfulness

It's common to forget everyday things like people's names, phone numbers, appointments, or where you left your keys or glasses.

Everyone forgets things from time to time – this is a normal part of how memory works.

Our brains are designed to let go of information we don't need to remember.

As we get older, it's also normal for memory to become a little slower or less sharp. This is a natural part of ageing.

Some types of epilepsy are associated with cognitive issues. Problems with learning and memory are amongst the most reported problems.

WHAT AFFECTS MEMORY?



Epilepsy

Epilepsy, treatment, general health, lifestyle and sleep, plus emotional and social factors can all affect memory.

Many people with epilepsy report problems with their memory.

Seizures disrupt normal brain activity. People who have regular seizures may have more difficulties with their memory but not everyone who has epilepsy experience difficulties.

Some seizure medications can affect memory particularly if taken in high doses, or several are being taken.

For people with epilepsy who feel they have memory problems, the cause is most likely a combination of:

Other factors that may contribute

- Attention and concentration – if you are tired, unwell or distracted, you may not remember things as you are not focussed
- Lack of meaning – if the information is not of interest or relevant to you
- Mood – stress, anxiety, depression and their treatments may affect memory
- Sleep deprivation
- Some medications
- Poor diet
- Alcohol, cigarettes and illicit drugs
- Seizures
- Other health conditions and their medications

Seizures and memory

Seizures disrupt normal brain activity. Therefore, depending on the type of seizure and where in the brain it occurs, different abilities can be affected.

Some types of epilepsy such as temporal lobe epilepsy are more likely to impact memory because the temporal lobes play an important role in memory formation.

People who have regular seizures may have more difficulties with their memory. Not everyone with epilepsy experiences such changes.

Some epilepsy medications may affect memory particularly if taken in high doses, or if two or more medications are prescribed. Speak to your doctor or pharmacist about your medication(s) and their side effects.

Memory problems can be caused by a combination of factors including seizures, treatment, general health, lifestyle, sleep, plus emotional and social factors

WHAT CAN HELP?

Tips and Strategies

- Try to exercise daily. Physical exercise increases the blood circulation to the brain.
- Eat healthy foods, drink enough water. Keep your alcohol intake to a minimum, avoid smoking or drugs.
- Get enough sleep. Sleep is essential for memory, and we function much better following a good sleep.
- Mental stimulation. Keep your mind active and challenge yourself. Learn a new skill (e.g. sewing, woodwork) or try something new (e.g. tai chi, dancing). Activities that boost social interaction have added benefits.

Be Organised



- Be selective in what you try to retain.
- Focus on what is important and repeat important information.
- Concentrate when receiving new information and try to relate it to something familiar.
- Keep a diary, calendar or a journal and use it diligently. Use reminders or alarms on your watch or phone.
- Break down complex tasks into smaller steps.
- Plan activities. For instance, if your memory is better in the mornings, then do things that require more concentration in the morning.
- Stick to a routine as much as possible.

Other Strategies



- Develop memory routines. These are habits that you do every day to lessen memory mistakes. For example, storing certain items such as keys, wallets and sunglasses in the same place in your house and have a routine of things you check as you leave the house.
- Reduce distractions such as TV, music, technology, and consider reducing your screen time.
- Prioritise tasks and decide what is important, make lists. Avoid taking on too many problems at once.
- Use pill box or Webster pack to dispense medication. These are available at chemists.
- Use a medication or seizure app.

! Factors such as sleep disruption, stress, anxiety and depression can add to memory difficulties.

Visit our website



Contact Epilepsy Action Australia on:

Phone: 1300 37 45 37

Email: epilepsy@epilepsy.org.au

[Make a booking with an epilepsy nurse](#)

Disclaimer: This information is given to provide accurate, general information about epilepsy. Medical information and knowledge changes rapidly and you should consult your doctor for more detailed information. This is not medical advice, and you should not make any medication or treatment changes without consulting your doctor.