

Epilepsy and Memory – Useful Strategies

Human memory, like a computer, allows us to store information for later use. We need memory for day-to-day functioning.

To form memories, you need to:

1. Be able to concentrate..
2. Pay attention.
3. Filter out distractions.

We have short and long-term memory. **Short-term memory** is stored temporarily, but with repetition and a conscious effort to retain information, is converted into **long-term memory**. Significant life events or information important to us, tends to consolidate short-term into long-term memories.

We tend to remember more meaningful events and personal information. This is thought to be because there is a strong emotional response, the information makes sense, and it is connected to other information already stored.

New information such as people's names, telephone numbers, music titles and singers, jokes, medications, appointments and where personal items were left are common things we forget. We don't need to retain everything, so our brain discards information not required. As we age it is common to have some degree of deterioration in memory function.

Seizures and memory

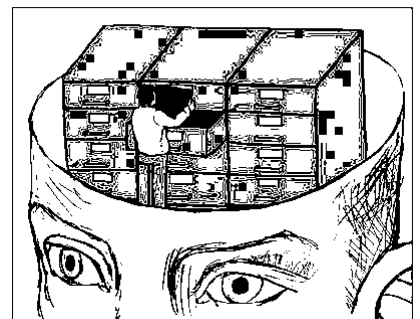
Many people with epilepsy report problems with their memory.

Seizures disrupt normal brain activity. Changes in thinking can occur before, during or after seizures. 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 many are being taken.

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

- The direct effect of seizures disrupting normal brain function
- Treatment
- General health and sleep
- Emotional and social factors



What can help?

If you have memory difficulties now this may not change, however, there are ways that you can protect, manage, and improve your memory. Some tips and strategies for doing this are:

Be healthy, look after yourself.

- Try to exercise daily. Physical exercise increases the blood circulation to the brain.
- Eat plenty of healthy foods which can improve your overall health and wellness.
- Drink enough water and keep alcohol intake to a minimum, avoid smoking or illicit drugs.
- Get enough sleep. Sleep is essential for memory, and we function much better following a good sleep.
- Mental exercises provide brain stimulation. Keep your mind active or try something new and challenging.
- If you feel your medication is affecting your memory, then speak to your doctor about this.
- Manage stress. Try stress reducing activities such as deep breathing, meditation, or other relaxation methods. If stress, depression or anxiety are a concern seek professional help.
- Be gentle with yourself. If you do forget something, remember, everyone forgets things at some stage.

Be organised.

- Be selective in what you receive and try to retain. Work on what is important to remember.
- Concentrate when receiving new information and try to relate it to something familiar.
- Focus on what is important. Repeat important information.
- Keep a diary, calendar or a journal and be diligent in its use.
- Plan, make lists.

Practical Strategies

- Put items such as keys, wallets and sunglasses in a regular place. Make it a routine when you walk in the door.
- Use diaries, calendars or organisers. Use reminders or alarms on your watch or phone.
- Ask others to remind you.
- Reduce distractions such as TV, music, technology, and consider reducing your screen time.
- Focus only for short periods at a time and allow breaks.
- Prioritise tasks and decide what is important. Avoid taking on too many problems at once.
- Use a dosette, pill box or Webster pack to dispense medication. These are available at chemists.
- 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 mornings.
- Stick to a routine as much as possible.

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NATIONAL EPILEPSY LINE

Answers for all your epilepsy related questions

1300 37 45 37

Call: 1300 37 45 37

Book Online: [Click here](#) to book a telehealth or phone appointment with an epilepsy nurse

Available Australia-wide



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 a few times 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. For example, when you put something down repeat the action in your head, visualise it or say it out loud.
- Where possible use the same location to place things.
- Use your imagination to expand on the image such as the keys are next to the computer. Imagine keys locking out computer viruses, or your wallet is in the kitchen, picture your wallet popping out of the toaster.
- Visualise or retrace your steps.

Further information

EAA Factsheet – [Epilepsy and Memory](#)

[How to improve your memory](#)

[Memory techniques](#)

References:

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