

Do you keep forgetting things... ?

What is memory?

Memory includes the ability to store, retain and recall past experiences and information. It also includes the ability to lay down new memories and later recall them when required.

How do I know if I have problems with my memory?

- Find it hard to learn and remember new things such as names.
- Forget appointments or what has been said.
- Losing things like your glasses or keys.
- Not able to read a book or sit through a movie as memory problems make it difficult to follow.
- Forget instructions or what you are supposed to do for the day.
- Not able to find the way to somewhere familiar.
- Forget what the doctor says.
- Forget what you did yesterday but able to remember things from a long time ago.
- Forget to pass on phone messages, or even that someone has phoned.
- Forget words, feeling that the word is on the tip of the tongue.
- Find it hard to keep track of conversations.

'Alice's' Story

'Alice' is a 52-year-old lady with a Glioblastoma (high grade tumour) in her left temporal lobe. Her family found that she is forgetting more and more. She can't recall what day it is, what she has been told and even forgets that she has a brain tumour. This is placing growing stress on her husband who feels overwhelmed with trying to keep track of her medical appointments and

taking on managing the house. 'Alice's' daughters find that they have to spend more time with their parents to lower their father's stress and support Alice who is needing more and more help in everyday activities because of her growing memory problems.

Strategies

For the person with a brain tumour

- Write everything down straight away using a diary, notebooks, lists, and a whiteboard.
- Use a 'to do' list for each day.
- Number the jobs to help with remembering which jobs to do but keep the list short.
- Keep the list to five items. Only add another item when one has been finished.
- Write a timetable for the week or use a wall calendar to note appointments.
- When you have to go to an important appointment (for example, the doctor), write down any questions you might want to ask.
- Take a notebook to write down the answers, take someone with you, or ask the doctor if you can record what he says on a mini tape recorder or your phone.
- Always leave your keys, purse, wallet or glasses in the same place.
- Keep a daily journal or diary of your activities.
- Keep yourself calm and give yourself plenty of time.
- Keep a routine.
- Repeat back to someone important information that you need to remember, this will check that you have

KEY FACTS

A survey of people with a brain tumour found that:

- 50% used memory strategies such as writing notes.
- 25% forget to do things but will remember when prompted.

heard it correctly and will help you remember for later.

- If you have something hard to learn, try to break it down into small pieces and then learn each one a little bit at a time.
- Learning to remember something new by breaking it down into little 'chunks' of information is called 'chunking'. For example, breaking long phone numbers into smaller groups of three or four numbers.

For the carer/family member

- Encourage the use of diaries and post-it-notes.
- Use notice-boards or calendars placed in central places around the home.
- Use maps or write out the steps to help get to people and services.
- Use prompts as a way to trigger the memory (i.e. reminders that trigger familiar or regular thoughts eg. names of pets, lunch at 12 noon, mailman always comes in the afternoon).
- Break tasks into smaller steps so there is not so much to remember.
- Give information slowly, one thing at a time.
- Use short simple sentences and simple direct language.



- Reduce distractions in the home/work environment.
- Change home/work situations to fit to an individual's level of coping.
- Schedule more demanding tasks when the person is at their best (often mornings).
- Do things in short bursts, allow for lots of breaks.
- Set realistic goals for reading activities (eg. short stories, and magazines instead of longer books).
- Find new interests for the person, which need less concentration if past hobbies can no longer be done.
- Label household items (e.g. drawers or kitchen cutlery) or even rooms if needed. Use words or symbols.

Questions to ask your health professional

- What is the likely cause of the memory problems?
- Is it related to the tumour itself?
- Is it related to the treatments given for the tumour or other medications?
- Could the memory problems be an unrelated medical condition and does this need treatment in itself?
- Do I/we expect the memory problems to get better or worse over time?
- Are there any medications that can help the problem?
- Can a psychologist help to treat this problem?
- Are there any diet or lifestyle factors that can help with the memory?

Links to other resources:

- <http://www.headinjury.com/memorystrat.html>
- <http://www.tbguide.com/memory.html>
Resource Sheet – Timetable
Resource Sheet – Memory Tips