

# Memory Menders

What did you say  
your name was?  
Where did I  
put my keys?  
Sound familiar?  
There's help.

**E**ver forget where you parked the car? Avoided someone at a cocktail party because you couldn't remember her name? Congratulations, you're normal, says Dr. Barry Gordon, founder of the Memory Clinic at The Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions, and author of *Memory: Remembering and Forgetting in Everyday Life*. "Our brains weren't built for perfect accuracy," he says. "They're not tape recorders, which is pretty much what we ask of our heads."

Our brains start to slow down around our 40s, making it harder to acquire and retrieve new information, says Cathryn Jakobson Ramin, author of *Carved in Sand: When Attention Fails and Memory Fades in Mid-life*. As a result, random thoughts jump into our heads and push important stuff to the side. Suddenly we forget why we're standing in the kitchen holding an extension cord and a toothbrush.

The good news is there are things we can do to mend our memories so the next time we're faced with remembering the name of an old acquaintance we'll be able to lift it from our subconscious with ease.

**PAY ATTENTION** If you really want to remember something, you have to focus on it so it sinks into your brain and forms an imprint, says Gordon. Otherwise, it evaporates. "Most forgetfulness in normal people is the result of not paying enough attention," he says.

**MAKE A SPOT** If you have trouble finding your keys or sunglasses, create a "memory spot" such

as a bowl or basket that you place near the door, says Michael Kohn, a forensic psychologist at Eastern State Hospital in Williamsburg, Virginia, and author of *The Memory Workbook*. Use it faithfully.

**MENTAL AEROBICS** An active brain is a healthy brain. Jakobson Ramin suggests visiting [mybraintrainer.com](http://mybraintrainer.com) once a day for a mental workout. "It's a coffee break for the brain," she says. Or steal your teen's Nintendo DS and try *Brain Boost: Beta Wave*, a clever and fun video game designed to improve concentration (\$15, [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)).

**FEED YOUR MIND** A diet rich in omega-3 fats, antioxidants, complex carbohydrates, and protein helps the brain stay sharp. Try to eat five small meals a day rather than three large ones to keep glucose levels steady. "That's what your brain lives on," says Jakobson Ramin. "It won't function smoothly and consistently without it."

**MOVE IT** Regular physical activity keeps you sharp by protecting the cardiovascular system that feeds oxygen-rich blood to the brain. "The healthier the body, the healthier the memory," says Kohn. "It's all connected." Try walking with a friend, biking, or swimming; anything that gets your heart rate up will improve your mental powers.

**FORGET ABOUT IT** If you don't have to commit something to memory, write it down. Gordon says he carries a 3x5 index card and pen with him at all times to avoid overcrowding his head. And if you do have a memory flub, don't sweat it. "People do get wiser with age," Kohn says. "And that wisdom comes from somewhere." Such as from a mind that takes its time mulling things over. —KATHLEEN PARRISH



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