



Improve Your Memory

CHALLENGE

Enhance your mind and memory.

Requirements to complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Read “Your Body, Your Mind” and “Memory Boosters.”
2. To complete the Challenge, you must do something every day that will enhance your mind and memory.
3. Keep records of your completed Challenge in case your organization requires documentation.

Your Body, Your Mind

Sure, your brain is part of your body. But in function, it could be likened to a computer. You input information – a fact, an emotion, an experience – and it gets stored in a “file.” Information judged to be important gets stored in a more prominent or accessible file while less important or insignificant information gets stored in the equivalent of a shoebox stuffed into an attic corner.

As you go through the day, you’re continually pulling up memory files. All of these stored bits of information help you make sense of the world around you. They help you recognize friends, find your way home, and know what to do when the phone rings.

The Long and Short of It

Memory-making involves two different processes: short and long. Short-term memory has a limited capacity and a limited duration. You don’t intend to make a permanent memory file for the information – just a temporary one. The average person can remember about 7 items for no more than 30 seconds – and often less time than that!

You use short-term memory when you are trying to dial a phone number you just looked up. If you are like most people, you’ll remember the area code and the first 3 digits, and then “something, something, something, something...”



But, if you say that number repeatedly or come up with a clever way of hooking that phone number into your mind, you may never forget it. You’ve just stored the data in your long-term memory files.

Long-term memory is more deliberate. These are the labeled files placed in storage centers in your mind. Some storage centers record experiences and emotions, such as what you ate for dinner last night, where you went on your first date, and the theme of your tenth birthday party. You can recall the sights, smells, sounds, and emotions associated with the memories. Other parts of the brain retain facts, concepts, and skills – the names of the months in the year and how to use a fork, for example.

Your long-term memories are drawn from bits of information in files throughout your brain, that are all pulled together in a moment. For example, take the day you graduated from high school. You probably can remember what you wore, the weather, the sound of your shoes as you walked across the stage to receive your diploma, and whether you were happy or sad. You probably remember even more information than that!

But sometimes you can’t find a memory file. We’ve all forgotten a name, where we put our keys, or if we locked the front door. Sometimes it’s because the information isn’t there – it’s a lack of acquisition. Maybe you weren’t really listening when you were introduced to someone new. Sometimes you can’t remember because your brain filed a piece of information randomly, rather than in a tidy, well-labeled file. This is a storage issue.



People who throw the information in a pile to be sorted through later are sometimes referred to as “right brained.” They’re creative, but not necessarily organized. They might have problems recalling multiplication facts, but they can tell you the color of their best friend’s grandmother’s kitchen that they saw once 12 years ago. Theirs isn’t a memory problem. They just haven’t created logical files. You remember best if you link memories into a meaningful, organized structure.

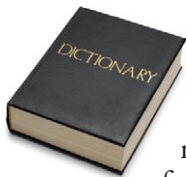
Some people joke about having a “senior moment.” This is a problem with retrieval. You filed the information correctly – and you’ve recalled the information before. But at this particular time, you can’t. Give yourself a few minutes, and you’ll likely remember what you forgot.

As many people grow older, it takes them longer to retrieve their memory files. But by making healthy lifestyle choices, you can keep your body and mind strong into your senior years.

Memory Boosters

In the past, memory loss and confusion were considered a normal part of aging. Scientists now know that most people can remain both alert and mentally capable as they age – even if it takes them a little longer to remember things.

There are certain basic ways you can improve your memory, although not all memory-boosters work for all people. Some people have an easy time remembering names. Others find numbers easily stick in their mind. Some people are directionally challenged while others can find their way to anywhere.



No matter your strength – or weakness – your memory can be improved. You just need to find what works for you and be persistent.

It's like learning to play the piano or play basketball. To improve your memory skill, you need to practice!

Manage your stress. People who experience a lot of distress also report many memory failures. Remember that a certain amount of stress is healthy. It's when the stress is overwhelming that your body and mind suffer.

Challenge your mind.

Join a book club and engage in lively debate. Play chess and other board games. Do crossword or sudoku puzzles. Read informative books. People who do this regularly are less likely to develop dementia.



Get in touch with your artistic self. Creative activities – whether painting, gardening, or writing poetry – increase brain activity.

Stay physically fit. In one study, older adults who stayed physically fit throughout their lives maintained their childhood IQ scores. Another study found that physical frailty was associated with Alzheimer's disease.

Nap! A short nap in the afternoon can help you retain information learned earlier in the day. Long-term memories are formed as you sleep.

Do something you love. Dance. Teach children to read. Start your own blog. Not only will you enjoy life more, but the mental stimulation might reduce your risk of dementia.

Learn a new skill. Take a computer class or study astronomy. Learn to play the violin or speak a different language. Taking on a new skill exercises – and thus strengthens – your brain.

Broaden your input. Researchers have found that taking in information from a variety of senses – sight, smell, hearing, and touch, for example – greatly increases your memory.

Keep your heart healthy. Every heartbeat pumps 20-25% of your blood to your brain. Heart disease decreases brain function, particularly reasoning, vocabulary, and verbal fluency. Risk factors for heart disease include smoking, diabetes, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure. Eating a well-balanced diet, such as the DASH diet, might reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease.

Get adequate B12. A recent study found that vegans (who don't eat meat, dairy, or eggs) actually lose gray matter if they become deficient in B12.



Use memory aids. Keep track of appointments in a daily planner. Post "to do" lists on your refrigerator. Mark birthdays, anniversaries, and other important dates on a prominently displayed calendar.

Be socially involved. Isolation is a risk factor for mental decline, so look for ways to interact with others. Work a part-time job. Join a community club or church group. Volunteer for a cause you feel strongly about.

Eat omega-3s regularly. Salmon, tuna, and other oily fish may help preserve your memory as you age. In one study, people who ate broiled or baked fish high in omega-3 fatty acids at least 3 times a week had a 25% lower risk of memory problems and stroke. Other sources of omega-3 fats include walnuts, flaxseed, and soy.

Reminisce. When you recall how you celebrated Thanksgiving as a child or your favorite family vacation, you can trigger other memories.

Stay positive! Hope and optimism improve brain function and longevity.

Eat fruits and veggies.

They are full of antioxidants that help keep your brain healthy and reduce the risk of memory problems.

Walk every day! It only takes 6 months of regular walking to increase your attention span and improve your thinking. For maximum benefit, walk 10-15 miles per week. (This is equal to about an hour of moderate exercise 5-6 days a week.) But if you're not used to exercise, don't worry. You'll begin to experience benefits by walking only 7 miles a week. That's taking a brisk 30-minute walk just 4 days a week.



Increase “good” cholesterol levels. HDL (“good”) cholesterol lowers the risk of heart disease and dementia. To raise your HDL, exercise regularly, lose excess weight, and avoid trans fats.

Get adequate rest. People who are fatigued or sleepy can’t stay focused and experience memory problems. Aim for 7-8 hours each night. Don’t cut your sleep short.

Keep your décor interesting. Paint the walls a bright shade, hang colorful pictures, and display family photos and keepsakes. Decorate your home for each holiday. Fill your rooms with books, CDs, and DVDs – and then read, listen, and watch.

Express yourself. One study found that writing skills are an indication of how long you’ll live and how vulnerable you’ll be to Alzheimer’s disease. The more ideas you can pack into written sentences, the lower your risk.

Share. If you tell someone else your memory or fact, you are fixing that information more firmly in your mind.

Repeat it! Reviewing newly learned facts will help firmly establish them in your memory. Instead of repeating something many times in a short period, as if you were cramming for an exam, re-study the essentials after increasingly longer periods of time. For best retention, repeat the fact within 20 minutes, then after 1 hour, once a day for a week, and again in a month. After several years of annual review, the fact will be permanently etched in your memory. Spacing out periods of study is particularly valuable when you are trying to master complicated information.

Read about more ways to improve your memory: www.wellsource.info/wn/improving-memory.pdf

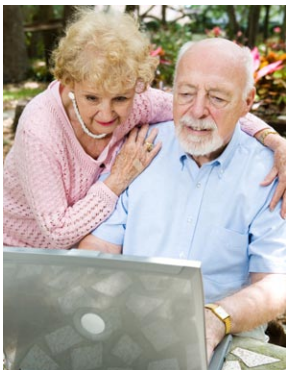
Protect your head. Head trauma increases the risk of Alzheimer’s. Wear a helmet when biking, skiing, and rollerblading. And wear a seatbelt while driving or riding in a car.

Pursue learning. Take online classes or attend your local college to get the degree you’ve always wanted. Having fewer years of education is associated with mental declines associated with dementia.

Protect against brain loss. One surprising finding came from the landmark Nun Study. In it, approximately one-third of the sisters – whose brains (after death) were found to be riddled with Alzheimer’s plaques and tangles – had shown no symptoms of dementia when they were alive! It seems that you can protect against the ravages of dementia and Alzheimer’s even if your brain succumbs to some of the pathological changes. The nuns were well-educated, kept themselves mentally and physically active, and had a positive outlook on life.

Be alert! Forgetting how to use the telephone or find your way home may be signs of a more serious problem. Memory loss could be caused by Alzheimer’s disease or other types of dementia, stroke, depression, head injuries, thyroid problems, or certain medicines. If you have that degree of memory loss, it’s important that you see your doctor.

Is your memory loss normal, or should you make an appointment for an evaluation? Find out at: <http://www.intelihealth.com/IH/ihtIH/WSIHW000/31393/31398/347730.html?d=dmContent>



Surf the web for other ways to build your brain power.

A quick search of the Internet provides you with hundreds of ways to improve your memory and keep your brain healthy. Beyond that, the simple act of searching the web triggers key centers in your brain that control decision-making and complex reasoning. Neuroscientists at UCLA recently conducted a brain-function study on middle-aged and older adults (aged 55 to 74). They found that although reading stimulates the areas of the brain that control memory and language, surfing the web activates the entire brain. Using the Internet to gather information requires you to make choices about what link to click on for the most information, which is a complicated task for your brain. The more computer-savvy you are, the more active your brain while you are searching the web. The findings suggest that using the Internet regularly can improve brain function.

Sources:

Champeau R. UCLA Study finds that searching the Internet increases brain function [press release]. October 14, 2008. National Institute on Aging. National Institutes of Health. 2008.; Johns Hopkins University. Brain Health Library. 2008.; Alzheimer’s Association. 2008.; American Heart Association. 2008.; American Academy of Neurology. Eating Fish May Prevent Memory Loss and Stroke in Old Age [press release]. Aug. 4, 2008.; American Academy of Neurology. Vitamin B12 May Protect the Brain in Old Age [press release]. Sept. 9, 2008.; Neurology. April 26, 2005.; Journal of the American Medical Association. Sept. 3, 2008.; Journal of the American Medical Association. Oct. 1, 2008.; European Heart Journal. July 23, 2008.; Snowden D. Aging with Grace: What the Nun Study Teaches Us About Leading Longer, Healthier, and More Meaningful Lives. Bantam Books. 2001.; Hendrie HC, Albert MS, Butters MA, et al. The NIH Cognitive and Emotional Health Project: Report of the Critical Evaluation Study Committee. Alzheimer’s & Dementia: The Journal of the Alzheimer’s Association. 2006 Jan; 2(1): 12–32.; Harvard Health Publications editors, Hartley LH, and Lee I-M. Exercise: A Program You Can Live With. Harvard Medical School. 2008.; Devi G and Mitchell DR. What Your Doctor May Not Tell You about Alzheimer’s Disease: The Complete Guide to Preventing, Treating, and Coping with Memory Loss. Warner Books. 2004.





Improve Your Memory

Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Make a notation each day you do something to improve your brain and boost your memory.
3. At the end of the month, total the number of days you were able to meet the goal. You must meet this goal at least 22 days during the month to complete the Challenge. Then keep up this healthy practice for a lifetime of good health!
4. Turn in your Health Challenge if requested, or enter your completion of this Health Challenge on the Health Activity Tracker report for the month, if applicable. Keep this record for evidence of completion.

CHALLENGE
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 mind and
 memory.

MONTH:							HC = Health Challenge™	ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary	
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_____ Number of days this month I enhanced my mind and memory

_____ Number of days this month I got 30+ minutes of physical activity such as brisk walking or biking

Other wellness projects completed this month:

Name _____ Date _____

