

# UNDERSTANDING MEMORY LOSS

## Memory changes

There is a difference between memory loss as a part of normal ageing and as a symptom of dementia. This information describes those differences and provides some tips on keeping your memory sharp.

One of the main symptoms of dementia is memory loss. We all forget things from time to time, but the loss of memory with dementia is very different. It is persistent and progressive, not just occasional. It may affect the ability to continue to work, or carry out familiar tasks. It may mean having difficulty finding the way home. Eventually it may mean forgetting how to dress or how to bathe. An example of normal forgetfulness is walking into the kitchen and forgetting what you went in there for, or misplacing the car keys. A person with dementia however, may lose the car keys and then forget what they are used for.

## Key points about normal forgetfulness

- ❖ As we get older, the most common change that we complain about is memory change. Knowledge about how memory changes as we get older is a lot more positive than in the past. Memory change with healthy ageing certainly doesn't interfere with everyday life in a dramatic way.
- ❖ Everyone is different, and the effect of getting older on memory is different for each person.
- ❖ Recent research describes the effect of getting older on attention processes, on the ability to get new information into storage, on the time it takes to recall things and “on the tip of the tongue” experiences.
- ❖ Research also suggests that immediate memory and lifetime memory do not change as we get older.

# UNDERSTANDING MEMORY LOSS

## Tips for keeping your memory sharp

As yet, there is no prevention or cure for dementia. However, here are a few tips for keeping your brain fit and memory sharp:

- ❖ Avoid harmful substances. Excessive drinking and drug abuse damages brain cells.
- ❖ Challenge yourself. Reading widely, keeping mentally active and learning new skills strengthens brain connections and promotes new ones.
- ❖ Trust yourself more. If people feel they have control over their lives, their brain chemistry actually improves.
- ❖ Relax. Tension may prolong a memory loss.
- ❖ Make sure you get regular and adequate sleep.
- ❖ Eat a well balanced diet.
- ❖ Pay attention. Concentrate on what you want to remember.
- ❖ Minimise and resist distractions.
- ❖ Use a notepad and carry a calendar. This may not keep your memory sharp, but does compensate for any memory lapses.
- ❖ Take your time.
- ❖ Organise belongings. Use a special place for the unforgettables such as car keys and glasses.
- ❖ Repeat names of new acquaintances in conversation.

# UNDERSTANDING MEMORY LOSS

## Distinguishing between normal memory loss and dementia

Description	Person with Dementia	Older Person
Events	May forget part or all of an event	Memory may sometimes be vague Sometimes may forget.
Words or names for things or objects	Progressively forgets	Words or names are on the 'tip of the tongue'
Written and verbal directions	Increasingly unable to follow	Able to follow
Stories on TV, in movies or books	Progressively loses ability to follow	Able to follow
Stored knowledge	Over time loses known information such as historical or political information	Although recall may be slower, information is essentially retained
Everyday skills such as dressing and cooking	Progressively loses capacity to perform tasks	Retains ability, unless physically incapable.

For further information contact Alzheimer's Australia or the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**.