

# Early Memory Loss



**Your brain works a lot like a computer, storing important information or memories in parts of your mind as if they were files.**

When you remember something, your brain will open the file. But as you get older, it may take longer to find these files and for you to remember things.

You have three types of memory:

- *Recent memory* may include what you ate for breakfast this morning.
- *Short-term memory* may include the person you just met or something you just read.
- *Long-term memory* includes memories stored from the past, like childhood memories.

Age-related memory loss usually affects your recent memory, but not your short-term or long-term memory. So forgetting things from time to time doesn't mean you have Alzheimer's disease. You may just have early memory loss related to aging, and can use reminders and brain exercises to help cope and keep your mind alert.

## Causes and Symptoms

As you get older, your brain changes and it's normal to take longer to remember things, have more trouble learning new things, or lose things more easily. You may occasionally forget an appointment, misplace your keys, or not remember a name. Normal age-related memory problems don't affect your daily life or get worse over time.

In addition to aging, memory problems can also be caused by other health conditions like blood clots in your brain (leading to stroke), depression, head injuries, thyroid problems, substance abuse like alcoholism, or reactions to certain medicines. It can also be caused by Alzheimer's disease.

If your memory loss is related to Alzheimer's disease, you might have trouble:

- **following conversations**
- **driving around familiar places without getting lost**
- **performing familiar tasks** like following a recipe, using the phone or handling money and paying bills
- **remembering names of people you know well**
- **remembering common words when you're speaking**, or mixing up words

If you notice these symptoms in yourself or a loved one, talk to your doctor.

## Treating Early Memory Loss

If you have early memory loss, the goals of treatment are to figure out what may be causing your memory trouble if it's not just normal aging, and to help keep your mind alert to prevent further memory trouble.

If your memory problems are caused by a certain medicine you're taking, your doctor may prescribe another medicine that won't have this side effect.

Your doctor may also focus on treating your other health conditions that may be causing your memory trouble. If you are taking medicine for other conditions, always take your medicine as prescribed. Don't stop taking your medicine without talking to your doctor, even if your symptoms go away. And don't stop taking a medicine because of side effects. Your doctor will work with you to find a medicine, or combination of medicines that works for you.

Beyond this, your doctor will recommend healthy lifestyle changes and coping tools (see p. 2).



To learn more, visit  
**HealthyAdvice.com/  
Memory**

You can also visit these  
websites:

- **Alzheimer's Association**  
[www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)
- **Medline Plus**  
[www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov)
- **National Institute  
on Aging**  
[www.nia.nih.gov](http://www.nia.nih.gov)

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## What You Can Do

Try these tips to help keep your mind sharp and help prevent or delay memory loss:

- **Exercise for 30 minutes five days a week.** Exercise not only helps you manage your weight and stay fit, but it increases blood flow throughout your body, including to your brain. This can help keep your mind sharp. Plus, regular aerobic exercise has been shown to reduce or delay risk for Alzheimer's.
- **Keep your mind active.** Do crosswords, play board and card games, learn a new language or instrument, join a book club or take alternative routes when driving to exercise your brain.
- **Get organized.** Use a calendar to keep track of appointments and other activities. Make lists, and keep important things like your keys, wallet or purse in the same place. Also, use labels to serve as reminders—"hand towel drawer" or "turn off the stove."
- **Socialize.** Spending time with loved ones can reduce stress and risk of depression, which can play a role in memory loss. Volunteering in your community is another good way to keep socially active.
- **Plan ahead.** Give yourself enough time to do things so you're not rushed. And avoid distractions like the TV or your phone so you can focus on the information at hand—directions, names, etc.
- **Keep it simple.** Develop daily routines that are easy to follow. This can limit confusion. Write a list of daily tasks and check them off to help keep track.
- **Eat a heart-healthy diet.** Eating well is good for your brain and your heart. Focus your diet around fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and avoid alcohol.
- **Manage other health conditions.** High blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes can contribute to blood clots in your brain, or stroke. These can cause memory loss. Ask your doctor if you are doing all you can to control your health conditions.
- **Check your medicines.** Some drugs for other health conditions can affect your memory. Ask your doctor to review your medicines and their side effects with you.

## Remember:

- It's normal to forget things as you age, but more serious memory problems affect your daily life and get worse over time.
- Your doctor can help figure out the cause of your memory problems so you can find the treatment that's right for you.
- Exercise, socialize and keep your mind active to help stay alert as you age.

