

The brain is a powerful, unique part of our body. The way we use it defines so much of who we are and how we live our lives. That's why we worry when it begins to test us with forgetfulness in our senior years.

Instant recall isn't instant anymore? *That's okay.*

Forgetfulness tends to march into our lives as we get older. The brain that was once sharp as a tack often will struggle to remember dates, names and events. This can be frustrating and frightening, but more times than not it's completely normal.

It's important to know how to distinguish between what's common forgetfulness in the senior years and what's a sign of the onset of dementia.



Age-Related Memory Loss:

*When It's Normal,
When It's a Warning Sign*



A FAITH-BASED, NOT-FOR-PROFIT HEALTHCARE SYSTEM
RIVERSIDE METHODIST HOSPITAL + GRANT MEDICAL CENTER
DOCTORS HOSPITAL + GRADY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL + DUBLIN METHODIST HOSPITAL
DOCTORS HOSPITAL-NELSONVILLE + HARDIN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL
MARION GENERAL HOSPITAL + REHABILITATION HOSPITAL + O'BLENESS HOSPITAL
MEDCENTRAL MANSFIELD HOSPITAL + MEDCENTRAL SHELBY HOSPITAL
WESTERVILLE MEDICAL CAMPUS + HEALTH AND SURGERY CENTERS
PRIMARY AND SPECIALTY CARE + URGENT CARE + WELLNESS + HOSPICE
HOME CARE + 28,000 PHYSICIANS, ASSOCIATES & VOLUNTEERS

© OhioHealth Inc. 2014. All rights reserved. FY14-170-3297. 03/14.



What Is Normal Age-Related Forgetfulness

A memory lapse is just that — a temporary failure to remember something. It's forgetting a phone number or the name of a close friend you knew a long time ago. The main difference between normal forgetfulness and a serious memory disorder is that normal forgetfulness may be annoying, but it does not disrupt your ability to function in daily life.

- + **Normal forgetfulness is often absentmindedness:** Being unable to find something you use every day, such as your cell phone or wallet, because you were thinking about something else when you put it down.
- + **Normal forgetfulness is often “blocking”:** The information is on the tip of your tongue, but you can't reach it because other information has gotten in the way.
- + **Normal forgetfulness is often a delay in recall:** You read a great book and two days later can't remember the title. It just didn't stick for a host of reasons, including stress in your life or it's simply a hard-to-remember title.

Is this what you're forgetting? *It's normal!*

Many become forgetful during their senior years. These examples of forgetfulness are commonly experienced, and they're normal:

- + where you last put your glasses, your car keys or other objects you use regularly
- + a street name someone just told you, or the name of a movie star in a film you just saw
- + events and dates you used to recall without pause, and yet now it seems to take longer to remember them
- + the reason you walked into a room, knowing you came to get something, but forgetting what you came for

Why memory loss occurs when we age

As we get older, our body changes, and some of those changes result in the normal occurrences of forgetfulness. Some of those changes include:

- + a decrease in blood flow to the brain
- + a decrease in the body's absorption rate of brain nutrients
- + a decrease in the production of hormones and proteins that encourage neural growth and protect brain cells

Some memory loss comes from treatable medical conditions

If you're experiencing an increase in forgetfulness, it could be a result of the following medical conditions. Treatment can alleviate the problem:

- + medication side effects
- + extreme stress
- + depression
- + vitamin B12 deficiency
- + thyroid, kidney or liver problems
- + alcohol abuse
- + dehydration
- + insufficient sleep

Warning Signs for the Onset of Dementia, Including Alzheimer's Disease

Dementia-related memory loss is a cognitive disorder that's a progressive, real loss of memory. It impairs your ability to function in daily life, including accomplishing everyday tasks, such as shopping, cooking and driving. Its frequency and extremes become noticeable to family and friends.

Symptoms of a serious memory condition:

- + asking the same questions over and over again
- + getting lost in places you know well, such as your house or neighborhood
- + not being able to follow simple, basic directions
- + becoming more confused about time, people and places
- + not taking care of yourself — eating poorly, not bathing or being unsafe

When to See Your Doctor

Talk to your doctor if you experience repeated, concerning symptoms of forgetfulness. Your physician may diagnose the problem, or refer you to a cognitive specialist.

Prior to your appointment, write down three to five incidents of memory loss to help your doctor diagnose your forgetfulness. Bring a friend or family member to the appointment to help describe what you're experiencing.



How to Keep Your Brain Healthy as You Age

The brain is capable of producing new brain cells at any age. But just as it is with muscle strength, you have to “use it or lose it”. Your life choices can have a significant impact on the health of your brain.

Engage in physical activity. Exercise maintains healthy blood flow to the brain and encourages the development of new brain cells.

Eat healthy foods. A low-fat, low-cholesterol diet is good for your overall health and helps prevent stroke.

Stay mentally active. Reading books, learning a new language, doing crossword or number puzzles — activities that involve mental skills — encourage better brain function.

Be social. Engaging in social activities is not only fun but also reduces stress, which can impair memory.

Get enough sleep. Consistently getting a good night's sleep helps with recall and better brain function overall.