

Laughter is the best medicine

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

What if you could never again forget a friend's birthday? The bad news is, not everyone has a photographic memory, otherwise known as eidetic memory. Most of us rely on mnemonic devices. The good news, however, is that everyone can take steps to improve their memory, and with time and practice most people can gain the ability to memorize seemingly impossible amounts of information. Whether you want to win the World Memory Championships, ace your history test, or simply remember where you put your keys, this article can get you started. Convince yourself that you do have a good memory that will improve. Too many people get stuck here and convince themselves their memory is bad, that they are just not good with names, that numbers just slip out of their minds for some reason. Erase those thoughts and vow to improve your memory. Celebrate even little achievements to keep yourself motivated.

Now try to create a clever phrase that starts with the first letter of those words: fairy tales feel true for some time. You're now much more likely to remember that phone number. Alternatively, you could create a story that involves characters buying things and doing more things with them... Use your imagination. The point is that you want to connect the phone number to something else. Throwing your best friend as a character in the story would be a good idea too. Association also works if you created vivid, memorable images. You remember information more easily if you can visualize it. If you want to associate a child with a book, try not to visualize the child reading the book that's too simple and forgettable. Instead, come up with something more jarring, something that sticks, like the book chasing the child, or the child eating the book. It's your mind to make the images as shocking and

emotional as possible to keep the associations strong. Group information together to help you remember them; this is called chunking. Random lists of things (a shopping list, for example) can be especially difficult to remember.

To make it easier, try categorizing the individual things from the list. If you can remember that, among other things, you wanted to buy four different kinds of vegetables, you'll find it easier to remember all four. Another example: you probably won't remember, but try putting a space after every fourth number. Now you can see that those numbers are years, and you can pick key events from each year to help you remember the string of numbers. Repeat information you're trying to memorize to yourself every few days or so. This is called spaced repetition learning. We are more likely to remember more recent things and things that we've experienced with greater frequency[2], so repeating associations and mnemonics to yourself is a good idea. Start practicing every day, and you can gradually decrease the frequency until you remember it naturally. Flash cards are especially useful for studying. It's essentially a card with a question on one side and the answer on the other. You can also put two things you want to associate on opposite sides of a flashcard. In the course of learning a topic, you would have a stack of cards and would go through them testing yourself. Those that you got right you would put to one side and review a few days later. The more difficult ones might take several days to fix in the brain. However, how do you determine the ideal time to review the cards that you have temporarily remembered? Leave it too long and, like all memories, it may have faded and we forget the answer. If we review it too soon then we waste

time looking at it. We need some system to know exactly when to review each card.

This is where "Spaced Repetition Software" comes in. This software automatically works out the most efficient time to test you on each card for optimum memory retention. There are a number of free bits of software out there for you to use. Cramming only works to put information in your short-term memory. You may remember the information for your exam the next day, but you will barely recall the unit when it's time to take the final. Spacing out your studying is important because it gives your brain time to encode the information and store it in your long-term memory. Organize your life. Keep items that you frequently need, such as keys and eyeglasses, in the same place every time. Use an electronic organizer or daily planner to keep track of appointments, due dates for bills, and other tasks. Keep phone numbers and addresses in an address book or enter them into your computer or cell phone. Improved organization can help free up your powers of concentration so that you can remember less routine things. Even if being organized doesn't improve your memory, you'll receive a lot of the same benefits (i. e. you won't have to search for your keys anymore). When it's time to study or remember something new, switch your breathing pattern to be slower and deeper. Deeper and slower breathing actually changes the way your brain works, by inducing the brain's electrical pulses to switch to Theta waves. Theta waves normally occur in your brain in hypnogogic sleep. This is the stage of sleep when outside noises like an alarm clock can influence dreaming. It turns out being in this stage also can aid memory. A good example is the tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon when information you've

been trying to think of all day suddenly comes back to you after napping or waking up from sleep.

To activate your theta waves, switch your breathing to your lower abdomen - in other words, start breathing deeply from your stomach. Consciously slow your rate of breathing too. After a few moments, you should feel calmer, the Theta waves should be flowing in your brain, and you should be more receptive to remembering new information. If the above advice does not work you may consider using nootropic supplements. Nootropics are generally well-tolerated and can help aid in improving overall memory. Racetam supplements like Piracetam is very popular for improving memory but there are also strong herbal nootropics like Bacopa and Huperzine. Exercise your brain. Regularly "exercising" the brain keeps it growing and spurs the development of new nerve connections that can help improve memory. By developing new mental skills -- especially complex ones such as learning a new language or learning to play a new musical instrument -- and challenging your brain with puzzles and games, you can keep your brain active and improve its physiological functioning. Try some fun puzzle exercises every day such as crosswords, Sudoku, and other games that are easy enough to for anyone. Regular aerobic exercise improves circulation and efficiency throughout the body -- including the brain -- and can help ward off the memory loss that comes with aging. Exercise also makes you more alert and relaxed, and can thereby improve your memory uptake, allowing you to take better mental "pictures". Reduce stress. Chronic stress does in fact physically damage the brain, it can make remembering much more difficult.

After prolonged stress, the brain will start to become affected and deteriorate. Stressful situations are recognized by the hypothalamus, which in turn signals the pituitary gland. The pituitary gland then secretes adrenocorticotrophic hormones (ACTH) which influence the adrenal glands to secrete adrenaline and later, cortisol (corticosteroids). The corticosteroids can weaken the blood-brain barrier and damage the hippocampus (the memory center). Ironically, the hippocampus controls the secretion of the hormone released by the hypothalamus through a process of negative feedback. After chronic stress, it will begin to deteriorate and will not be as efficient in regulating the degenerative corticosteroids, impairing memory. Neurogenesis (formation of new neurons) indeed exists in the hippocampus, but stress inhibits it. Realistically speaking, stress may never be completely eliminated from one's life, but it definitely can be controlled. Even temporary stresses can make it more difficult to effectively focus on concepts and observe things. Try to relax, regularly practice yoga or other stretching exercises, and see a doctor if you have severe chronic stress as soon as possible. Eat well and eat right.

There are a lot of herbal supplements on the market that claim to improve memory, but none have yet been shown to be effective in clinical tests (although small studies have shown some promising results for ginkgo Biloba and phosphatidylserine). A healthy diet, however, contributes to a healthy brain, and foods containing antioxidants -- broccoli, blueberries, spinach, and berries, for example -- and Omega-3 fatty acids appear to promote healthy brain functioning. Feed your brain with such supplements as Thiamine, Niacin and Vitamin B-6. Grazing, or eating 5 or 6 small meals throughout the

day instead of 3 large meals, also seems to improve mental functioning (including memory) by limiting dips in blood sugar, which may negatively affect the brain. Make sure it's healthy stuff. Take better pictures. Often we forget things not because our memory is bad, but rather because our observational skills need work. One common situation where this occurs (and which almost everyone can relate to) is meeting new people. Often we don't really learn people's names at first because we aren't really concentrating on remembering them.

You'll find that if you make a conscious effort to remember such things, you'll do much better. One way to train yourself to be more observant is to look at an unfamiliar photograph for a few seconds and then turn the photograph over and describe or write down as many details as you can about the photograph. Try closing your eyes and picturing the photo in your mind. Use a new photograph each time you try this exercise, and with regular practice, you will find you're able to remember more details with even shorter glimpses of the photos. Give yourself time to form a memory. Memories are very fragile in the short-term, and distractions can make you quickly forget something as simple as a phone number. The key to avoiding losing memories before you can even form them is to be able to focus on the thing to be remembered for a while without thinking about other things, so when you're trying to remember something, avoid distractions and complicated tasks for a few minutes. The amount of sleep we get affects the brain's ability to recall recently learned information. Getting a good night's sleep a minimum of seven hours a night may improve your short-term memory and long-term relational memory, according to recent studies

conducted at the Harvard Medical School. 8 Build your memorization arsenal. Memory pegs, memory palaces, and the Dominic System are just some techniques that form the foundation for mnemonic techniques, and which can visibly improve your memory. Memory pegs involve visualization methods in which you make use of various familiar landmarks, associating the to be learned information to these various popular landmarks.

Memorize your favorite song or poem until you can say it to yourself without any help. Try to do this often. Most people's brains are not very good at remembering abstract information, such as numbers. This is one of the things that separate those with eidetic memory from those with a great, normal memory. The key to being able to recall such things is to build associations and links that evoke the memory. This is why almost anybody with normal brain functioning can dramatically improve their ability to recall things using mnemonics. While building a memory palace, for example, actually requires that you "remember" more, by associating the thing to be remembered with other things (emotions, other memories, images, etc. you build more mental "links" to the memory, thus making it easier to access.

- Visualize whatever you have to do as part of something you see every day. For example, if you have to give your dog some medicine, visualize your dog in your fridge every time you walk past it or look inside. This will keep your dog fresh in your mind. There are also games that have been created to help you improve your memory. Playing some of these will help. Take a tray of objects (say, 10 objects). Study them for 30 seconds. Take the tray away and write down all the objects you can. Increase the number of items to exercise the mind even more. Or, get someone else to find the objects on the tray;

this makes them harder to remember and will test you more. Leave yourself a telephone message reminding yourself of important "to do" tasks. Try memorizing the order of a deck of playing cards. Although this may seem like a pointless task, it will allow you to discover memorization techniques that work best for you. ·Put black ink at the end of your palm to remember any important thing for the next day or for that day itself. Whenever you see the black dot, you'll remember what to do. Write in a diary or journal every day without fail. Even small issues should be written down this is a good way to make sure you don't miss anything. A large number of memory improvement products are available (a search on the internet will produce hundreds of such products).

Most of these products actually teach you mnemonic strategies, and while some are no doubt bunk, some are legitimate. ·One easy method to help you remember people's names is to look at the person when you are introduced and say the person's name: " Nice to meet you, Bill. Another way to remember someone's name is to visualize that person holding hands with another person you know well with that name. It's weird but it works. ·Write the event or task down immediately. If you don't have a pen, one thing you can do is change the time on your watch; later on, you will remember why it is set at the wrong time. You could also wear your watch upside down. When studying, take a break every so often, and do something dynamic, run up and down the stairs a couple of times, go back to your work in ten minutes ·Talk with someone about what you are trying to remember. Its easier to remember the more you repeat it. If you're poetically inclined, try turning some things you need to know into a song or poem. A good memory means

a peaceful mind. While some herbal supplements that claim to improve memory may in fact work, there is no conclusive evidence that any of these are effective. Most are harmless, however, and maybe worth a try, but exercise caution: some supplements can have harmful effects, and not all contain what they say they contain.

Exercise due diligence when purchasing a memory improvement product. Find out as much as you can about how the program works, and do your own research to determine if it will work for you. Some of these products are simply scams. Be especially wary of products that promise to improve your memory instantly or with little or no effort: effective strategies to improve recall take time and practice. If you notice a severe or sudden deterioration of memory, talk to your doctor immediately. Sometimes these can be precursors to Alzheimer's disease or dementia.

Consecutive Numbers Quickly
How to Express Yourself
How to Improve Emotional Intelligence
How to Improve Mind Power
How to Focus on Healthy Eating to Improve Exam Performance

Edit. Sources and Citations
MedlinePlus. Links to all sorts of scientific information on memory
Wikipedia Article on mnemonics, with tons of examples
NASA Tutorial on memory (with some fun exercises). A review of some memory-enhancement products
BBC Radio 4's 'the memory experience'
How to get smarter, one breath at a time
Time Magazine article reporting on the impact of meditation on the brain.