

# IMPROVING EVERYDAY MEMORY AS YOU AGE

Research shows that the human brain starts to shrink with age. When the brain shrinks, your ability to remember things can decline. You can help offset the decline in memory with regular activity that challenges both the mind and the body.

Here are some tips to help minimize age-related changes and improve everyday memory:

## **Stay active**

Cardiovascular activity for 20 to 30 minutes at least three times a week is important for physical and mental health. Try walking, swimming or another activity that you enjoy. Physical activity enlarges the hippocampus (the most vital part of the brain for memory) and improves long-term memory.

## **Sleep more**

It is a common misconception that sleep needs decline with age. What often happens is sleep patterns change. As we age, we spend more time in lighter sleep stages than deeper sleep stages. Try and get as much sleep as it takes for you to feel rested (at least seven to nine hours), and this includes and encourages naps.

## **Continue to socialize**

Being social and getting out improves your memory and your mood.

## **Be sure you can see and hear well**

It is hard to learn new things and remember old things if you can't see or hear well. Wear your prescription glasses or hearing aids if they have been prescribed to you. Have your sight and hearing tested periodically.

Avoid distractions that divert your attention. Distractions can range from trying to do several things at once to loud background noises. Even your own thoughts can distract you. When you're preoccupied, it's harder to pay attention. Stay focused on one task at a time so you don't forget directions or other important information.

## **Try new things**

New experiences, such as going to a new place or even taking a different route to your usual places, can also improve recall. Trying new things activates the part of your brain that turns short-term memory into long-term memory.

## **Use these memory aids**

Despite the best efforts, episodic memory, which captures the "what," "where," and

“when” of daily life, declines somewhat over time. So does long-term memory. The American Psychological Association offers these suggestions:

- Make lists of what you want to accomplish and check off items when they are finished. Follow your established routine.
- Don't hurry. Take your time learning new information or remembering old information.
- Stay organized: Keep things you use a lot in the same place each time. Put your keys and other important things somewhere that you walk by frequently.
- Make visual associations to remember names or places.
- Keep a calendar or planner of important dates. Check it throughout the day.

#### **When to get help**

Normal memory problems should not affect your everyday life. If you occasionally forget where you put things, you might just need to get better organized. However, if you forget how to do something or what to do in certain situations, you should see a health care provider. These memory problems are not a normal part of aging.