



How to boost your memory

Keep losing your keys? Frequently forget to keep appointments? Can never find your shopping list? If this sounds like you, don't despair. **Madeleine Jennings reveals how memory works and ways to improve yours.**

Our ability to think and make memories is dependent on healthy brain function. There are three basic parts to the brain: the cerebrum, the cerebellum and the brain stem. Each has a specific function and the largest and most complex of these, the cerebrum, controls our ability to acquire, deposit, store and recall information.

Subconscious activity

The brain is constantly receiving internal and external messages (or stimuli) via the five senses, which it has to process and interpret, then redirect to other

specialised parts of the brain so the body can act upon these messages appropriately. Some of these messages we are aware of, while others are subliminal, resulting in conscious and unconscious behaviour.

As the control centre for the entire body, the brain can never stop working,

Remember to keep moving

Physical exercise will help your brain by improving circulation and memory. Even moderate physical exercise, such as walking, can boost your memory. Researchers believe it works by improving oxygenation and nutrition for the brain.

otherwise the heart and lungs would also stop, but it does need to rest in the form of sleep. Decreased brain activity during sleep allows the body to focus on other necessary

functions, such as suspending nervous system activity, relaxing muscles and repairing itself. There are various phases of sleep and it is during the deep, rapid-eye movement (REM) phase when we are able to make better mental connections and convert short-term memories into long-term ones. Dreams also occur during the REM phase and can help us make sense of stimuli, unconsciously solving difficult problems. Getting enough sleep is essential for mental and physical health, and people are often advised to 'sleep on it' when making important decisions as the brain is much more alert in the morning after a good night's sleep.

Memory-enhancing strategies

Many people whose job involves 'executive function', that is, the ability to plan, organise, initiate action and speak in public, as well as remain on track, adapt and recover, have powerful abilities of recall. If you want to boost your memory, but don't necessarily aspire to become prime minister, there are still plenty of things you can do. These include

eating well, staying hydrated, getting enough sleep, being physically active and using your brain – read books, listen to discussions on the radio that make you think, do crosswords or Sudoku puzzles, and spend time with friends, especially those with whom you have long histories and shared memories.

If you are a parent, encourage your children to develop good lifestyle habits early on, as repetition cements memories. And it's not too late to get yourself into the habit of finding somewhere suitable to put your belongings each time, for example, keys by the front door on a hook or important household documents in a folder on your bookshelf. The old adage of 'Don't put it down, put it away' is good to recite out loud for this purpose. Just as learning your times tables requires rote learning, learning another language or how to play a musical instrument also requires repetition and practice, which then becomes embedded in your

long-term memory, so encourage these activities in your children or take them up as hobbies yourself.

Natural memory boosters

Research shows ginkgo biloba, brahmi, ginseng, sage, omega-3 fatty acids, flaxseed oil and vitamin B12 can all improve memory and cognitive function. If you don't like eating these in their natural form (oily fish is a good source of omega-3 and seaweed and offal contain vitamin B12), try supplements. If you're pregnant or have a medical condition, always consult your GP or healthcare practitioner beforehand. ☺

Madeleine Jennings is a freelance writer and editor specialising in health and lifestyle issues. She was formerly the deputy editor of The Journal of Complementary Medicine.



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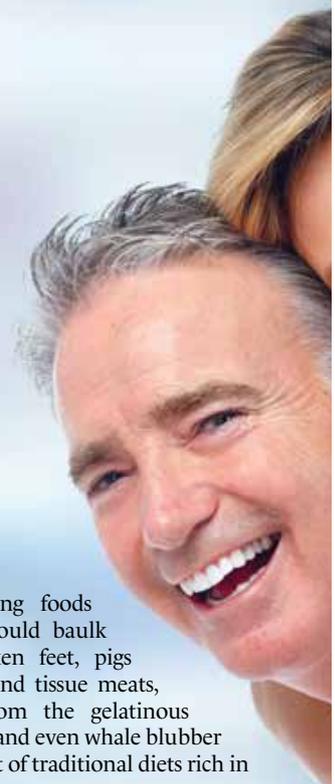
Collagen supplements have long taken centre stage in Japanese beauty regimes. Now Australians wanting smoother skin, softer hair, stronger nails and even reduced joint pain are taking notice.

Collagen is a vital structural protein found in the connective tissue of animals, which supports cells, tissues and bones. It comprises amino acids wound together to form elongated fibrils and is predominantly in fibrous tissues such as tendons, ligaments and skin. Our body's natural production of collagen slows during our 20s and eventually stops, resulting in wrinkles, brittle nails, sunspots and dry hair.

Throughout history people have sought to increase their collagen intake through

diet; often eating foods most Aussies would balk at today. Chicken feet, pigs trotters, organ and tissue meats, aspics made from the gelatinous parts of animals and even whale blubber have formed part of traditional diets rich in collagen.

Getting back into the kitchen, learning about the nutrients in ingredients and diversifying protein consumption beyond muscle meats is one way to increase



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