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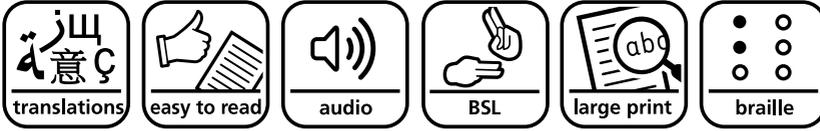
Worried

about

your

memory?

This resource may also be made available on request in the following formats:



 0131 314 5300

 nhs.healthscotland-alternativeformats@nhs.net

Acknowledgments

This booklet was written by Kate Fearnley.

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Contents

What is a 'normal' memory?	3
What should I do if I'm worried?	4
What can affect memory?	6
Mild cognitive impairment	9
Brain injury	11
What if it is dementia?	13
Helping your memory	16
What can I do to keep well?	18
Where to get help	20

'Quite often when someone asks what I did at the weekend my mind goes blank and I haven't a clue. But I don't worry about it – I've always been like that.'



memory

tip

If you mislay important things like your keys or your purse, choose one place to keep them (for example in a bowl on the kitchen table) and get into the routine of always keeping them there.

What is a 'normal' memory?

There is no such thing as a 'normal' memory. Everyone is different. One person might never forget a name, while someone else is hopeless at putting names to faces. Don't compare your memory with that of other people.

It is normal to get a bit more forgetful with age. Children have the best memories, while the rest of us have to work harder to remember things, especially as we get older.

It is also normal to have little 'lapses' every so often. Most people occasionally forget what they went into a room for, or can't quite find the word that's on the tip of their tongue.

When this happens, we usually remember later on what it was we were looking for, or the word we were trying to say.

'Sometimes I can't remember someone's name when I'm talking to them – but it usually comes to me later when I've stopped trying.'

What should I do if I'm worried?

Many of the things that cause memory problems can be treated. It is important to see your doctor if:

- your memory has changed significantly or rapidly from what is 'normal' for you
- your memory has been getting steadily worse over a period of time
- your memory is causing new problems in your life, such as difficulty managing money, or forgetting important appointments
- you are noticing other problems too, such as changes in your mood or behaviour, having difficulty following conversations or experiencing some issues performing familiar tasks
- people close to you start telling you that they are worried about you forgetting things.

Perhaps you could talk to someone who knows you well to see if they have noticed any changes from what is normal for you. Other people may notice your memory problems before you do. If this happens, ask them about what they have noticed. This can be difficult, but it is best if you have a full picture of any changes that may have taken place.

If you are unsure about any of these things, it is a good idea to see the doctor anyway.

Before you visit the doctor, it can help if you make a note of what is worrying you. You could keep a diary of any problems you have, so that you can give the doctor a clear picture of what is going on.

Ask for a double appointment, to allow plenty of time to discuss your concerns. Take a notepad with you so that you can write down what the doctor says. It may be helpful to take someone you trust along with you to the appointment to support you. He or she could also give the doctor another point of view about what you have been experiencing. Don't be afraid to say how you really feel. Between the two of you, it is likely that you will remember what has been discussed.

Your GP may refer you to a memory clinic or a specialist to better understand what has been happening. This may include more detailed testing of your memory, and sometimes other tests.

'I'm 52. Recently my memory has been dreadful and I've been really forgetful. The last straw was when my sister came down for the weekend and I forgot all about it – I got home to find she'd been on the doorstep for two hours. I was afraid to go to the doctor, but my husband finally persuaded me. My GP did some tests and told me that it was due to an underactive thyroid. I've been taking medication for a while now and I feel much better.'

What can affect memory?

All kinds of things can affect memory or make people feel confused. Many of these things, although distressing at the time, can be cured or treated. For example, chest or urinary infections, depression and the side effects of some medication can all make some people confused. Memory problems caused by things such as the emotional distress of bereavement will get better on their own, in time.

'When I was going through my divorce last year, I felt as if my mind was going. I kept forgetting things all the time. Eventually I went to my doctor, and she said that stress and anxiety affect concentration, and this causes memory problems. I didn't get better right away, but I started relaxation classes, and now my memory is back to normal.'

Some of the things that can affect memory are:

- stress or anxiety (worrying about your memory can make it seem worse)
- having too many things on your mind
- illness and infection
- unhappiness and depression

- bereavement
- lack of sleep
- noise or other distractions
- vitamin deficiency or a thyroid disorder
- the side effects of sleeping pills, sedatives or other drugs
- overuse of alcohol
- the menopause
- conditions, such as mild cognitive impairment, a stroke or dementia
- a minor brain injury after a bump to the head, or concussion
- delirium
- general anaesthetic.

'I had a chest infection last year and it made me very confused. To be honest I don't remember a lot about it, but my daughter says I was forgetting what day it was, not taking my antibiotics and forgetting to eat. She was really worried about me, but once the infection cleared up I was okay again. My doctor said it's quite common for infections to do that to older people.'

If you feel that you are stressed or anxious, talk to your doctor or practice nurse. NHS Health Scotland have also produced a booklet and accompanying relaxation CD called Steps to deal with stress, which may be helpful. They are available from your local Patient Education Resource Library or you can email **nhs.healthscotland-publications@nhs.net**



memory

tip

If you sometimes forget to take your medication, ask your chemist about pill boxes with different compartments, to help you remember to take your pills.

Mild cognitive impairment

After doing some tests, a specialist doctor may decide that you have mild cognitive impairment, which is usually called MCI for short. MCI can affect people of any age, but is more common in older people. MCI means that although you can still function perfectly well, you have more difficulty with mental abilities than would be expected as you get older.

If you have MCI, you will probably feel that your memory isn't quite what it used to be. Some people find that other mental processes are also affected. For example, you may have difficulty with concentration.

MCI is not the same as dementia. The symptoms may seem similar, but MCI is much milder. Some people with MCI do develop dementia, but others do not.

MCI doesn't mean you have to stop getting on with your life. Use the tips in this booklet to help your memory. If you would like more information about MCI, call the 24-hour Freephone **Dementia Helpline** on **0808 808 3000** or email **helpline@alzscot.org**

'I was starting to get so frustrated with myself. I'd joke about it, but underneath I was worried about getting forgetful. When I finally went to see my doctor she sent me to see a specialist, who diagnosed MCI and gave me advice on how to manage my memory problems. Now at least I know what I'm dealing with.'



memory

tip

Label cupboards and storage vessels as a reminder of where things are kept. Labelling perishable food with the date it was opened can also be helpful.

Brain injury

Memory problems are very common after brain injuries, such as traumatic brain injuries, strokes, tumours or viral infections. After a significant head injury – one in which the person loses consciousness for a period of more than a few minutes – it is possible to experience a period of post-concussion syndrome and memory problems, sometimes for quite a while. Some people have trouble remembering events or things that have happened in the past, while some people's short-term memory is affected.

If you feel that your memory is not as good as it was before a head injury, speak to your local GP about it. Explain what happened and the changes you have noticed. You may be referred to a neuropsychologist or an occupational therapist who will be able to help you with the changes in your memory. The GP may also refer you to your local minor head injury clinic or community brain injury team.

For more information, the fact sheet, Coping with memory problems – practical strategies, is available to download for **free** at www.headway.org.uk/media/2797/coping-with-memory-problems-practical-strategies-factsheet.pdf. Further publications can be accessed from shop.headway.org.uk/shop/publications/c-24/c-76

NHS Health Scotland thanks Headway for their contribution and advice on this section.



memory tip

Keep a list of important things to do before you go to bed at night – like making sure the cooker is turned off, the fridge door is shut and the front door is locked.

What if it is dementia?

Dementia is an illness that affects the brain. The four most common types of dementia are Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia, frontotemporal dementia and Lewy body dementia.

Only a doctor can diagnose you with dementia. Although progressive, it can be very gradual. If you have a diagnosis of dementia, it does not mean you will suddenly become very ill or dependent on others.

The good news is that there is a great deal of research being carried out into the causes and treatment of the different kinds of dementia.

If you have been told that you have dementia, you may be feeling a range of emotions. Shock, disbelief and even relief can all be natural responses to dementia. Talk to someone about how you feel. The Freephone Dementia Helpline is available 24 hours a day on **0808 808 3000** for information, support and advice.

Everyone in Scotland diagnosed with dementia from 1 April 2013 is entitled to at least a year of support after diagnosis. Ask your GP or contact Alzheimer Scotland for more information.

'My tip is to be positive, and challenge yourself. That's what I do. And speak to other people with dementia... join a group like I did.'

Most forms of dementia are not inherited, although genetics can play a part. This is more common in younger onset dementia. If you have a family history of dementia and would like further information you should discuss this with your GP or consultant.

People with dementia, and their families and friends, report that there are many ways to make life easier when living with dementia. You may find the booklet, *Living well with dementia*, and accompanying DVD helpful. Both are aimed at those who have recently been given a diagnosis of dementia and are available from the Dementia Helpline or from your local GP practice.



memory

tip

If you're comfortable with mobile phones, let the technology work for you. Find out how to set the alarm so that your phone can beep to remind you about things you need to do.

Helping your memory

There are many practical ways to help yourself if – for whatever reason – you are having difficulty with your memory.

Different things will help different people. Think about the main things that frustrate you, and then work out ways around them. Establish routines for yourself so that you don't have to rely on your memory all the time. Here are a few examples:

- Make lists, or keep notes in a diary or on your phone, of the things you've done and the things you have to do. Keep these lists where you can easily see or find them. For example, pin the list to a noticeboard, or keep the diary in your pocket or bag. Try to always write things down on the same list, in the same place. Get into the habit of checking your list regularly.
- If you're comfortable with mobile phones, let the technology work for you. Find out how to set the alarm so that your phone can beep to remind you about the things you need to do. It's even better than a diary because you don't have to remember to look at it!
- If you sometimes forget to take your medication, ask your chemist about pill boxes with different compartments, to help you remember to take your pills.
- When you meet someone new, help yourself remember his or her name by using it several times in the conversation. But if you forget, just ask!

- You don't have to worry about remembering to pay regular bills. If you set up standing orders or direct debits, your bank will pay them automatically for you.
- Ask your family or friends to help. For example, someone could phone to help you remember an appointment, make sure you pay a bill, or help you with your diary or reminder lists.

'I have a whiteboard in my kitchen – I use it for my shopping list, and every morning my husband reminds me of things I'm doing that day and I write them on the board.'

Some people feel embarrassed about having a memory problem, or lose confidence in themselves. But often it is easier if you are open about it. If you're having difficulties, try telling people that your memory isn't very good and asking for help. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

You should consider setting up a power of attorney so that if you don't want to manage your own affairs, or if a stage comes when your memory problems make it difficult for you to do so, then someone else who has been chosen by you is able to act on your behalf.

You should consider legally appointing someone close to you as an 'attorney' to make health, welfare and financial decisions on your behalf, if at some point you cannot make them yourself.

Many people find setting up power of attorney helpful, regardless of their situation, because no one knows what the future holds and it's reassuring to know someone you trust will be acting with your best interests in mind.

You can get information on this from Alzheimer Scotland, from a solicitor, or from the Office of the Public Guardian.

What can I do to keep well?

Some kinds of memory problems, such as dementia, will gradually get worse but others, such as memory difficulties after a stroke, may improve. It always helps to keep as well as possible.

Because there are so many different things that can affect your brain, there are also lots of things you can do to help keep it in shape. Some may not help your memory directly, but might help you enjoy life more.

Tips for keeping well:

- Keep up your normal activities as much as you can. Ask for help if you need it.
- Stay involved with your family, friends and community, and enjoy an active social life.
- Be aware of situations that may be difficult or stressful for you. Plan ahead and don't be afraid to ask for help if you feel uncertain or worried.
- Check your medication – ask your doctor if you need all the medication you are currently taking, and return what you don't need to a pharmacist.
- Ask your doctor to check your blood pressure and cholesterol levels.
- Eat a balanced and healthy diet – ask your doctor or practice nurse for advice.

- Do some regular physical activity, such as walking – aim for at least half an hour most days.
- Don't smoke. Even if you have smoked for years, you will benefit from stopping – your own health, your finances, your safety (lower fire hazard risk) and the health of others around you will all improve if you stop.
- Don't drink to excess or take illegal drugs – these can make you confused.
- Keep your mind active – continue with the things you enjoy, or take up a new interest.
- Reduce stress, or if you can't avoid it, ask your doctor or community psychiatric nurse (CPN) about stress management – simple relaxation exercises can help a lot.
- Make sure you get enough sleep.
- Other things that may be useful are the NHS Living Life telephone service (**0800 328 9655**) and the Living Life To The Full website (**lltf.com**).
- If you feel that you are stressed or anxious, talk to your doctor or practice nurse. NHS Health Scotland has also produced a booklet and accompanying relaxation CD called Steps to deal with stress which may be helpful. They are available from your local Patient Education Resource Library or you can email **nhs.healthscotland-publications@nhs.net**

'I don't know if it's helped my memory, but getting out and about for a walk every day has made a world of difference to how I feel, and I'm even sleeping better now.'

Where to get help

Alzheimer Scotland

160 Dundee Street
Edinburgh
EH11 1DQ

Phone: **0131 243 1453**

Email: **info@alzscot.org**

Website: **www.alzscot.org**

Alzheimer Scotland provides services and produces information for people with dementia and their carers across Scotland. They also run the Dementia Helpline.

Breathing Space

Phone: **0800 83 85 87** (free)

(Mon to Thurs: 6 pm to 2 am; Fri 6 pm to Mon 6 am)

Website: **breathingspace.scot**

Anyone can feel down or depressed from time to time. Breathing Space is a free, confidential service. They provide a safe and supportive space in times of difficulty by listening, and offering advice and information. A British Sign Language service can be accessed through the website.

Carers UK

Carers UK advice line: **0808 808 7777** (free)
(Mon to Fri: 10 am to 4 pm)

Website: **www.carersuk.org/scotland**

Visit the website for a wide range of useful information for carers, or call for information and advice.

Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland

Phone (direct): **0808 801 0899**
(free from landlines and mobiles)

There is also a text relay service at this number.
(Mon to Fri: 9.30 am to 4 pm)

Email: **adviceline@chss.org.uk**

Website: **www.chss.org.uk**

The CHSS advice line is staffed by specialist nurses and provides confidential advice on all aspects of chest, heart and stroke illness. They have booklets and factsheets available, including information on memory problems after a stroke.

CHSS specialist nurses can also be contacted by texting **NURSE** to **66777** (standard rates apply).

Dementia Helpline

Phone: **0808 808 3000** (free)
(24 hours)

Email: **helpline@alzscot.org**

To talk to someone, in confidence, about any concerns you have with your memory or someone else's, call Alzheimer Scotland's Dementia Helpline. It is open 24 hours a day for information, emotional support and a listening ear.



Dementia Services Development Centre

Iris Murdoch Building
University of Stirling
Stirling FK9 4LA

Phone: **01786 467740**

Email: **dementia@stir.ac.uk**

Website: **dementia.stir.ac.uk**

The Dementia Services Development Centre draws on research and practice from across the world to provide a comprehensive, up-to-date resource on all aspects of dementia.

Headway – the brain injury association

Bradbury House
190 Bagnall Road
Old Basford
Nottingham NG6 8SF

National helpline: **0808 800 2244** (free)
(Mon to Fri: 9 am to 5 pm)

Email: **helpline@headway.org.uk**

Website: **www.headway.org.uk**

Mental Health Foundation in Scotland

Website: www.mentalhealth.org.uk/scotland

Visit the website for a wide range of useful information relating to mental health and dementia. The Mental Health Foundation does not run a helpline and is not able to offer advice on individual mental health problems.

NHS 24

Phone: **111** (free)
(24 hours)

Website: www.nhs24.scot

When your GP practice is closed and you feel you can't wait until it opens, call NHS 24 on **111**.

NHS Inform

Phone: **0800 22 44 88** (free)
Website: www.nhsinform.scot

For up-to-date reliable information about illnesses and conditions, NHS services and current health issues.

NHS Living Life

Phone: **0800 328 9655** (free)
(Mon to Thu: 10 am to 9 pm; Fri: 10 am to 6 pm)
Website: www.nhs24.scot/our-services/living-life

Free telephone service providing both cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and guided self-help (based on a CBT approach) for anyone in Scotland feeling low, anxious or depressed.

Office of the Public Guardian

Hadrian House
Callendar Business Park
Callendar Road
Falkirk FK1 1XR

Phone: **01324 678300**

Email: **opg@scotcourts.gov.uk**

Website: **www.publicguardian-scotland.gov.uk**

Parkinson's UK

Confidential helpline **0808 800 0303** (free)
(Mon–Fri: 9 am to 7 pm, Sat: 10 am to 2 pm. Interpreting available.)

Website: **www.parkinsons.org.uk**

Text relay **18001 0808 800 0303**
(for textphone users only)

Email: **hello@parkinsons.org.uk**

Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH)

Brunswick House
51 Wilson Street
Glasgow G1 1UZ

Phone: **0141 530 1000**

(Mon to Fri: 9 am to 5 pm)

Email: **enquire@samh.org.uk**

Website: **www.samh.org.uk**

SAMH is Scotland's leading mental health charity.

Silver Line Scotland

Phone: **0800 4 70 80 90** (free, including mobiles)

Website: **www.thesilverline.org.uk**

Silver Line Scotland is a national helpline providing information, friendship and advice to older people, 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Stroke Association

Phone: **0303 303 3100** (calls cost no more than 01 or 02 numbers)

Textphone: **18001 0303 3033 100**

(Mon to Fri: 9 am to 5 pm)

Email: **helpline@stroke.org.uk**

Website: **www.stroke.org.uk**

Call or email for information, practical advice or someone to talk to about stroke, and how to cope with life after a stroke.

Your memory may be nothing to worry about, but this booklet will help you decide if you should visit your doctor.

Many people worry about their memory. Particularly as they get older, people become more concerned that forgetfulness could be a sign of something else, like dementia.

People who have had a relative with dementia may also be particularly anxious about memory problems. Most cases of dementia, however, are not hereditary. If this worries you, talk to your doctor. Don't keep your concerns to yourself.

Most of us have times when we cannot remember something we ought to know. This is likely to happen to everyone now and again in different ways.