

Does Getting Older Have To Mean Memory Loss?

from the American Counseling Association

Improvements in health care and lifestyles mean more of us are living longer than ever before. But with that bonus of extra years also comes worries for many of us about the natural reductions in our abilities that occur as we age.

Most of us can accept that our physical strengths decline with age, even beginning at a fairly young age (yes, you're only forty-one, but your teenage son will probably outrun you). What remains a source of stress is that our mental capabilities will also diminish as we get older.

The most immediate sign of the apparent "decline" is when we find we can't remember things. Whether we're thirty-five or sixty-five when we begin to notice lessened memory power, it's often stressful and possibly frightening.

The reality, of course, is that we all forget things, regardless of our age. As a teenager there were homework assignments or promises to parents that slipped your mind just as easily as the name of that colleague you saw at lunch yesterday. The difference is that back then you thought it no big deal, while now you're sure it's a sign that old age has you in its grips.

Experts say that for most people the decline in memory is actually very gradual and usually isn't obvious until age 70 or later. And simple memory loss is not necessarily a sign of dementia. While dementia does cause memory loss, it also includes declines in cognitive and intellectual functions such as comprehension, judgment, learning capacity and reasoning.

So while having some trouble remembering doesn't mean you're slipping into senility, if you're finding it increasingly troublesome, consider ways to improve memory.

Good starting points are eating a healthy diet, staying physically active and getting plenty of rest. All can help combat memory loss while helping you feel and function better overall.

Mental health experts also advise that memory can be improved and preserved through training and practicing memory skills. There are numerous books, computer programs, and online sites with exercises to improve memory. Learning a new skill, like cooking or chess, is another way to challenge and strengthen your mind.

But, if memory issues are truly bothering you, consider consulting your physician or a professional counselor. A counselor specializing in aging can offer diagnostic tests, as well as techniques, strategies and advice to make memory loss less of an issue in your life.

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