

General Tips for Managing Memory Problems

Small steps can make a big difference.



Memory changes naturally happen as we age, but there are ways to manage them.

Whether you're noticing changes in yourself or supporting someone else, small daily habits can help support a person's memory and keep them independent longer.

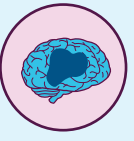
Understanding the Differences Between Normal Age-Related Memory Loss, Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) and Dementia



What is Normal Age-Related Memory Loss?

As we get older, it's normal to notice small changes in our memory. You might forget a name, misplace your keys, or take a bit longer to learn something new. These changes are usually mild and don't interfere with your ability to perform your everyday activities.

Normal age-related memory loss is different from Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) and dementia. While age-related memory loss is a natural part of getting older, it's still important to pay attention to changes and talk to a health care provider if you're concerned.



What is Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) and Dementia?

About 1 in 4 older adults experience MCI. This means you may notice more changes in your memory or thinking than would normally be expected with ageing. While you can still manage your everyday activities independently, some tasks may take more effort or feel more challenging than before.

Dementia is not a disease; it is a broad term for conditions that cause declines in memory or thinking that start to interfere with your ability to perform your everyday activities independently.

MCI can, but does not always, lead to dementia. While there is no cure for dementia, many people living with MCI can prevent or delay their risk of developing dementia and in some cases, reverse their MCI, especially when underlying causes are identified and treated (see next page).

For people living with dementia, there are some treatments to support memory and maintain independence as long as possible.



How Could My Memory Change if I Have MCI or Dementia?

While it is normal with age-related memory loss to forget some details of an event that took place a year ago, someone with MCI or dementia might not be able to remember the details of a very recent event.

While it is normal with age-related memory loss or MCI to forget the name of an actor in a movie, someone with dementia might not be able to remember the name of a family member, how to find a familiar place, or to take their medications, pay their bills, or prepare a meal or dress themselves.

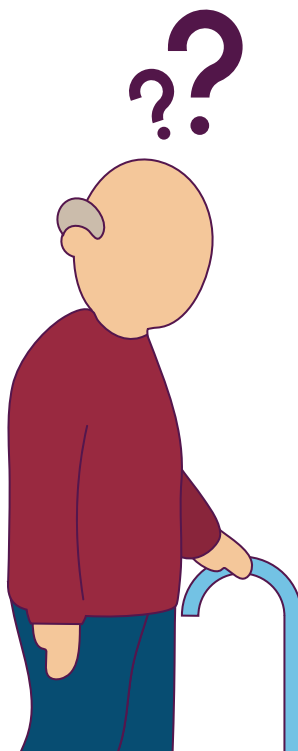
Common and Often Treatable Causes of Memory Loss

Memory changes don't always mean dementia. In fact, there are many common and often treatable reasons why your memory may be affected.

These can include:

- Stress, anxiety, or depression
- Side effects of medications (or combinations of medications)
- Sleep problems (including poor sleep or sleep apnea)
- Anemia
- Vitamin deficiencies (such as low vitamin B12)
- Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)
- Thyroid problems
- History of stroke
- Alcohol use
- Fatigue or low energy
- Dehydration or poor nutrition
- Head injury or concussion
- Hearing loss
- Vision problems

Many of these factors can affect memory, focus and concentration. Many can be improved with the right care and support.



Every Day Memory Strategies

Stay Organized

- Keep important items (keys, glasses, phone) in the same place
- Use calendars, notebooks, or reminder apps
- Write things down right away

Create routines

- Follow a regular daily schedule
- Do tasks at the same time each day
- Break complex tasks into smaller steps

Reduce distractions

- Focus on one thing at a time
- Turn off background noise when concentrating
- Give yourself extra time to complete tasks

Stay mentally and socially active

- Read, do puzzles, or try new activities
- Join an exercise class or try learning a new language
- Keep conversations and routines going

Support your overall health

- Get enough sleep
- Stay physically active
- Eat regular, balanced meals
- Manage stress

Work with your health care provider to identify and treat any reversible causes of memory problems. These steps can help prevent or delay further memory decline, including dementia.

Keep Track of Changes:



If memory concerns continue or worsen, writing things down can help you:

- Notice patterns
- Keep a journal and share information with a health care provider

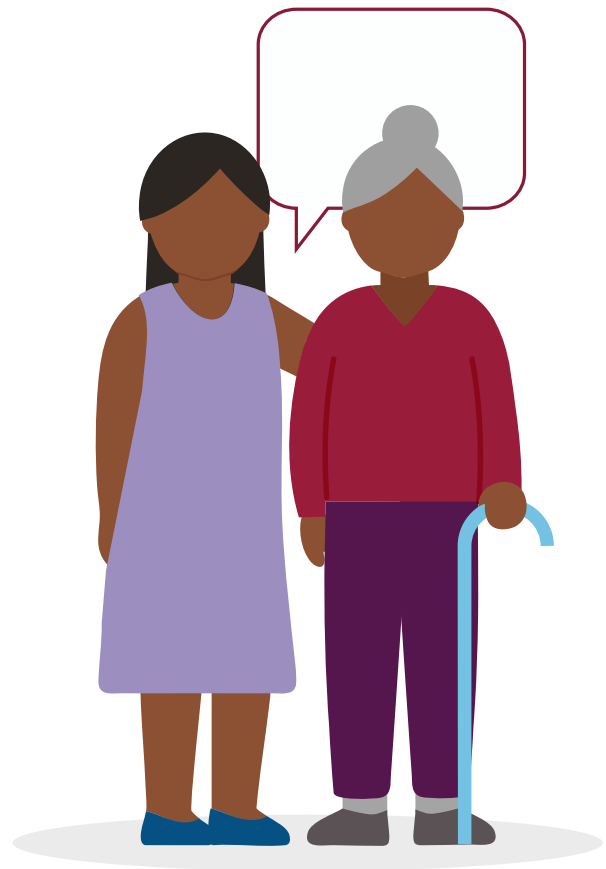
Tips for Family and Caregivers

If you're supporting someone with memory problems, small changes in how you communicate can make a big difference:

- Speak slowly and give them time to take in what you're saying and respond
- Use short, simple sentences
- Pause between ideas
- Repeat important information when needed
- Ask them to repeat it back or explain it in their own words to make sure it's clear

Other helpful tips:

- Try not to interrupt unless you need to
- Stick to one topic at a time—let them know when you're changing the subject
- Keep the environment calm and quiet for activities like reading or watching TV
- Offer gentle reminders for things like medications, appointments, or daily tasks
- Be patient—learning new memory strategies takes time and practice
- Encourage them to practice using tools like a notebook or phone as part of their routine
- Be flexible—what works now may need to change over time as needs evolve



Know when to seek help

If memory and thinking changes are:

- Increasing
- Affecting everyday activities
- Causing concern

Speak to your health care provider.

A reminder

Memory changes don't always mean dementia. But paying attention and taking small steps can make a big difference.

Need support?

Talk to a health care provider or visit trusted resources in your community.

Visit smallstepsbigdifference.ca