



# Up front

Tips, trends, everyday products

## How to boost your memory

**Misplaced your keys?** Forgot your colleague's name (again)? Most people experience some memory decline starting at about age 50; some, as early as their 30s.

But remember: Although aging is inevitable, losing your mental acuity is not. The brain is amazingly resilient, capable of making new connections, learning new skills, and compensating for aging—a concept known as neuroplasticity. Using the following tips can have a big effect on memory as you age:

**1 Feed your head.** Fruits, vegetables, and fatty fish might help preserve mental agility by protecting blood vessels and promoting regeneration of nerve cells. Make half of your plate fruits and vegetables; Department of Agriculture guidelines suggest. A Harvard study linked leafy greens and cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli and cauliflower with slowing cognitive decline. Avoid saturated and trans fats, which might hasten brain aging. Moderate amounts of caffeine can improve your short-term

learning and recall ability and temporarily improve your focus. But skip supplements of ginkgo biloba or ginseng. There's no good evidence to recommend either.

**2 Train that brain.** A 2009 study from the Mayo Clinic that involved 487 healthy adults ages 65 to 93, found that doing a computer brain-training program an hour a day, five days a week, for eight weeks was like turning the clock back 10 years and improved participants' memory and self-reported ability to perform tasks such as recalling a shopping list. The program from that study is sold online for \$395. But learning anything new can help. Take up a musical instrument, study a language, or learn to recognize birds.

**3 Work out.** Aerobic exercise improves circulation, which helps feed oxygen-rich blood to the brain. A study of nearly 300 older adults published in December 2010 reported that those who walked at least 72 blocks, roughly six miles, each week had more gray matter

than those who didn't walk as much, and cut their risk of developing memory problems in half. Aim for at least 30 minutes daily of brisk walking, biking, or another activity that gets your heart pumping.

**4 Connect with others.** Your brain thrives in a social environment. In a Harvard study that monitored 16,638 adults age 50 and older for six years, those who volunteered the most and connected with lots of family and friends were least likely to show declines on certain memory tests. Even 10 minutes of talking to someone improved memory and cognitive flexibility as much as doing puzzles, a University of Michigan study found.

**5 Try tricks.** Repeat (aloud or to yourself) directions or meeting times. Restating information can help reinforce it. Group lists into categories; mentally divide your grocery list into dairy, produce, and so forth. Or use mnemonics; when introduced to Joe, picture him holding coffee ("a cup of Joe").