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Memories of our Memory

Have you noted colleagues voicing concerns about memory loss? I have certainly had recent conversations on this topic and, I must admit, my own short-term memory and ability to store information are not what they used to be!

Want to test your short-term memory? [Try this test](#) provided by an Ontario clinic specialising in brain health and aging. It will take about 15 minutes to complete a few exercises to test your memory and brain function. I found it interesting – even fun! – and it provides a score for comparison within your age group.

What Causes Memory Loss?

It is normal to experience some memory loss as we age. It may be frustrating to forget someone's name, misplace car keys, or forget the purpose of walking into a room, but these are not indicators of a serious health condition.

There are many possible causes for memory lapses or foggiess in our ability to recall information:

- Lack of sleep or insomnia
- Medication side effects
- Underactive thyroid
- Alcohol
- Stress and anxiety
- Depression
- Infections
- Head injury
- Sleep Apnea
- Dementia

- Alzheimer's disease

Other factors that may be prominent within our member population include:

- **Perimenopause:** Mild memory problems and fogginess are common due to a drop in estrogen. Studies to date support the idea that depleting estrogen during perimenopause causes memory loss. Good news: memory usually improves again after menopause.
- **The impact of COVID:** Although more studies are needed, initial research has shown that those who are sick enough to have been hospitalized, those who developed long COVID, and – to a degree – most people who contracted COVID, experience problems with their memory and attention.

Minimizing Memory Loss

We often consider forgetfulness to be a normal part of aging. However, there are many things you can do to prevent or minimize short-term memory loss:

- **Eating a healthy, well-balanced diet:** Fueling the body properly – for example, eating vegetables and other nutrient-dense foods and avoiding sugars – helps to support proper brain function, including memory.
- **Maintaining a healthy weight**
- **Not smoking:** Regular smoking can negatively impact memory.
- **Prioritizing sleep:** Getting enough quality sleep supports brain function, including memory.
- **Sticking to a regular exercise routine:** Physical activity supports healthy thought processing and decreases the risk of memory loss.
- **Avoiding alcohol**
- **Prioritizing mental and emotional health**

These techniques can help those with forgetfulness to stay healthy and deal with changes in their memory and mental skills:

- Learn a new skill.
- Follow a daily routine.
- Plan tasks, make to-do lists, and use memory tools such as calendars and notes.
- Put your wallet or purse, keys, phone, and glasses in the same place each day.
- Stay involved in activities that can help both the mind and body.
- Volunteer in your community, at a school, or at your place of worship.
- Spend time with friends and family.
- Prevent or control high blood pressure.
- Get help if you feel depressed for weeks at a time.

When to be Concerned

It is normal to forget things every so often, but serious memory problems make it hard to do everyday things like driving, using the phone, and finding your way home. If you feel that you are struggling with any of the following behaviours, make an appointment with your doctor for a full assessment:

- Asking the same questions over and over again
- Getting lost in places that you used to know well
- Having trouble following recipes or directions
- Forgetting how to use common objects
- Becoming more confused about time, people, and places
- Not taking care of yourself —eating poorly, not bathing, or behaving unsafely
- Having trouble carrying out basic daily activities such as shopping

Talk with your doctor regarding your memory and other cognitive challenges to learn what may be the cause. Your physician will discuss your medical history and may perform one or more of the following:

- A neurological exam
- Cognitive, functional, or behavioural tests
- Brain imaging
- Screening for mood disorders like depression

Going Forward While Remembering the Past!

I was relieved to test my memory, and to learn that the foggiest and short-term memory blips that I experience are normal; I am hopeful that your own test results help ease any angst regarding your memory. It is important to seek help when you believe you are experiencing more serious symptoms, as there are treatments, medication, and other interventions that can help support your brain health and memory and, where required, slow down the onset and progression of disease.

Sources:

<https://www.insider.com/guides/health/treatments/short-term-memory-loss>

<https://www.verywellhealth.com/short-term-memory-loss-7108178>

<https://www.healthline.com/health/menopause-and-memory-loss>

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/memory-forgetfulness-and-aging-whats-normal-and-whats-not#:~:text=Signs%20that%20it%20might%20be, trouble%20following%20recipes%20or%20directions>

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Morandini', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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If you would like to contribute or have ideas about what you would like to see in the ReFresh series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.