

Coping With Memory Problems

There are many things that cause or contribute to memory problems, including unlikely diseases and medications. Knowledge and awareness can help ease the stress of "not knowing", or of false assumptions (regarding memory and aging). If arming seniors and their family members with information is the first step, where do they go from there?

Support In The Home

Family support can be invaluable. In addition to helping with the daily activities, they can offer reality orientation, supplying familiar music, objects, or photos, to help the person become more oriented. They can put the coping tools into action. (See column to the right.) And they can help manage medications, writing down reminders to avoid a dependence on memory.

Residential Care Options

Extended care facilities, such as residential care facilities, should be considered for those whose basic needs cannot be met in any other way or whose safety and nutrition is in jeopardy.

Memory Training

In a study on memory loss and aging, 142 healthy older men and women participated in an experiment to test whether or not training exercises could help them to maintain and improve memory function. They learned about different kinds of memory, how attention affects memory, remembering names and numbers, and maintaining memory improvements. They also learned many specific coping tools for remembering.

Self-Confidence - Very Important

In the study it became apparent that a senior's self-perceptions about their memory, and their self-confidence may be an even larger factor than the use of memory techniques.

Columbia University group facilitator Laurie Stricks adds that *"There was something very normalizing about learning that other people have these difficulties and that it doesn't mean that you are getting senile."* Once again, self-image is a big part of self-efficacy. If one sees oneself as being proficient at anything, that very self-image is the most important ingredient for developing such abilities.



Coping Tools

Some simple advice for improving recall is to make a conscious effort at it. If awareness can help one get over the anxiety of the situation, then certain techniques can be employed to improve functioning:

- Focus on *specific* pieces of information.
- Have new acquaintances repeat their names.
- Use a new acquaintance's name several times during your first conversations.
- Write everything down; use diaries, reminder notes, shopping lists, packing lists, etc.
- Designate one place to keep all items needed when one leaves the house.
- Keep a calendar for all important appointments and dates.
- When larger amounts of information need to be remembered, a technique called "chunking" can be employed.

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