

Memory and cognition

Healthy ageing



Memory and cognition means how you learn, understand and remember things.

As you age, the brain changes and some things become harder, such as concentrating and remembering. Other brain functions become easier, such as having the ability to see 'the bigger picture' in situations.

Memory and cognition issues can be influenced by things such as stress, illness, mental health conditions, medicines, reduced hearing or vision, or the onset of dementia.

Having a positive attitude and a healthy lifestyle can make a big difference. Here are some other things you can do to protect your memory and cognition.

Do different types of activities

Research shows that doing different types of activities helps to reduce the risk of dementia (diseases that affect your thinking, memory and behaviour). For example, you can:

- stay in touch with friends and family
- volunteer
- do physical activities, like walking and gardening
- learn a new skill that involves using your hands and mental effort (e.g. drawing)
- stay mentally active by reading books or doing puzzles, crosswords and crafts.

Have a healthy lifestyle

A healthy lifestyle can help to maintain good memory and cognition.

Try to:

- eat a balanced diet that includes brightly-coloured fruit and vegetables
- maintain a healthy weight
- avoid or stop drinking alcohol
- quit smoking.

Have regular health checks

If you are concerned about changes in your memory or abilities, see your doctor as early as possible. They will ask about your medical history and symptoms and do more tests if needed.

It's also a good idea to have regular vision and hearing checks – and use hearing aids if you need to.

Use memory aids

You can use memory aids to organise, record and remember important information. For example, calendars, diaries, journals, shopping lists, sticky notes and electric reminders on your phone and other devices.

You can also colour-code your keys for different locks and ask your pharmacist to set up a pill case so you remember to take important medicines.

Be kind to yourself

It's important to be kind to yourself. Relax and take your time when you need to remember things. And don't be hard on yourself if you forget something. If you forget someone's name, it's okay to let them know you've forgotten and ask again.

Focus on things you can do to help maintain your memory.

When to see your doctor

If you are worried about things like memory changes or difficulty with daily activities, see your doctor. They may refer you to a geriatrician, neurologist or memory clinic for a formal assessment. It's normal to feel anxious about the assessment, but the earlier you find the cause, the earlier you can get the support you need.

For more information, resources and references, visit jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/healthy-ageing.



Phone 03 9453 8999
jeanhailes.org.au

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Disclaimer: This information does not replace medical advice. If you are worried about your health, talk to your doctor or healthcare team.

We write health information for people with diverse backgrounds, experiences and identities. We use the term 'women', but we acknowledge that this term is not inclusive of all people who may use our content.

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