

## Maximising your thinking and memory abilities



### About this handout

The following strategies and tips may be helpful for older people with mild memory and thinking difficulties.

## Key strategies to improve your memory and thinking

### 1 Maintain a positive attitude

The way you feel about yourself can affect how you view life and the extent to which you seize opportunities and keep persisting.

Avoid thinking negative things about yourself, such as “I can’t do that” or “I’m too old”. Instead of thinking about what you can’t do, remember what you can do.

Older people **can** learn to apply new strategies to cope with memory and thinking difficulties!

### 2 Stay calm and don’t panic

Some older people become very upset by and preoccupied with their embarrassing memory mistakes. If you make a mistake or forget something, try not to panic or worry.

Be kind to yourself—remember that mistakes happen to people of all ages. If you are getting anxious, take time out to relax—have a cup of tea or chat to a friend.

It may also help to try brainstorming new strategies to cope with problems you may have.

### 3 Don’t rush

Give yourself plenty of time to learn and process new things.

Sometimes we need extra time to take in what we have just learnt. If you are having difficulties or becoming stressed or anxious, don’t try to fit too many things into your day. Give yourself plenty of rest time. Learn and use relaxation techniques and meditation.

### 4 Keep a calendar

For many people, keeping a calendar (that can be shared with the whole family) can be very useful. Put it somewhere obvious (i.e., in the kitchen) and keep it in the same place.

Some people use a large whiteboard. Other people find electronic calendars or mobile phones useful.

# Key strategies

## to improve your memory and thinking

### 5 Everything in its place

Try to keep things tidy and put everything in its place: if you always put your glasses in the same place, you will always know where they are.

### 6 Keep “to do” lists

Keep a list of all of the tasks that need to be done. This can help to unclutter your mind so you can pay attention to the task at hand. Make different “to do” lists for the day, for the upcoming week or weekend, and for the long term. Then use your lists to prioritise your tasks, so you don’t waste time trying to remember what to do next or wondering what you’ve forgotten to do, and to be sure that your most essential tasks get done first.

### 7 Establish a routine

Try to do things at the same time each day or on the same day each week. This can free up your mental resources to focus on remembering new things and doing some new activities.

### 8 Take care of yourself!

Eat a variety of healthy foods, including at least five servings of fruit and vegetables, each day. Eating fish as a regular part of your diet may also help to preserve your memory and thinking abilities.

Exercise on most days, ideally at a moderate level of intensity, for 30 minutes.

Visit your doctor for regular check-ups and to manage any chronic illnesses such as diabetes, high blood pressure or high cholesterol.

Do not smoke, or drink excessive amounts of alcohol.

### 9 Get involved in activities that you enjoy

Active participation in community activities can improve thinking and memory abilities throughout the lifespan.

Activities that include social, physical and mental components are best for keeping your brain alert—dancing, Tai chi, social bowls, singing in a choir, or volunteering! If possible, choose something new or with an element of challenge that will give your brain a workout.