

Take Control: Memory Manual



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*Memory problems can be frustrating and embarrassing.
To make matters worse, memory problems are often a 'hidden symptom' of a neurological condition; not obvious like a difficulty with walking or talking.
Memory problems can be a hard to spot and understand, but you're not alone.*

How to use this manual

- This manual can be used to begin to understand your memory issues better. It will teach you some simple management strategies to try out at home or work to begin to gain confidence.
- Take notes and scribble in the margins of this booklet to help you process the information!
- There is an **Action Plan** on page 17. Use this as you go along to note down any actions you want to take to support your memory.
- Share this manual with important family members or friends so that they understand more about your memory problems and can support you. There is a section at the back just for friends and family.
- You may be interested in joining the 'Take Control: Manage Your Memory' Group. Speak to your therapist to find out when the next group is running.



Remember: *there is no 'cure' for memory problems, but strategies in this manual can be learnt and practiced to make everyday life easier.*

How the brain heals: Neuroplasticity

The brain has the ability to **change** and develop. This is called **neuroplasticity**. This is illustrated by the 'Backstreets Story':



*“Imagine a **really busy city** during rush hour – the road and footpaths are really crowded. This busy city represents the **neural pathways** in the brain and the information moving along the pathways (messages, memories, commands).*

*Now, imagine that a **gas explosion** occurs right in the middle of the city. The traffic comes to a halt and there is gridlock. This explosion represents what happens when you suffer a brain injury.*

*The damage in the city centre will **not be able to be repaired**. Traffic diversions are set up around the damage from the explosion. The traffic now has to go down around the **backstreets** of the city. The traffic is now moving, but it is **slow**. The traffic gets **lost** easily and some of the cars give up and go home. But after a while, these new routes along the backstreets become more familiar. The traffic begins to flow again – it might never be as fast as the original roads, but the City is working again!”*

Adapted from the “Brain Tree Training” by Kit Malia & Anne Brannagan

Thinking of your brain in this way can help you feel less frustrated when you are struggling with your memory. Information might feel very ‘slow’ or ‘just out of reach’. Be kind to yourself, and understand that some new ‘roads’ might need to develop in your brain to help. This will take time. Strategies taught in this manual will help.

What is memory?

Our memory is a bit like a filing cabinet that works in 3 stages:



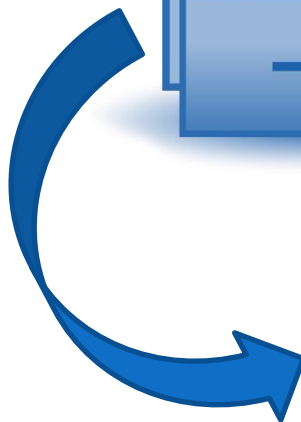
1. Attention:

With all new information, we have to attend to it and learn it - it may be easier to remember if we repeat it or make it more meaningful to us in some way



2. Storage:

We need to keep that information in our memory, like a storage cabinet. It is split into sections, new information needs to be stored in the correct area to be accessed later.



3. Recall:

We then need to find and recall it later- choosing the right drawer of the filing cabinet to retrieve the information.

Types of memory

There are lots of different types of memory. Here are the most common:

Working memory

Our working memory lasts for only seconds and allows us to hold information in our minds for a short period of time.

For example: reading a phone number and then dialling it.

Short term memory

Our short term memory is remembering information given to us in the last few hours, days, or weeks.

For example: remembering a conversation from last week.

Long term memory

Our long term memory allows us to remember things from a long time ago. These memories are usually easier to remember as they have been used several times and have more meaning to us.

For example: remember a family holiday from when you were a a child.

Do you think you have a problem with a **particular type** of memory?

Common Memory Problems

Memory problems are common, especially after a brain injury, stroke, or due to other neurological disorders. Some common issues are:

- Forgetting where I put things
- Forgetting phone messages
- Forgetting directions or getting lost
- Losing items or forgetting where things belong
- Forgetting what people tell me
- Forgetting what I need to do
- Going off on tangents when having conversations

Do you have particular memory problems you want to improve?

You can use these ideas in your Action Plan (page 17).

You might know that your memory is not great (or maybe people tell you that it isn't!), but find it difficult to pin-point areas to improve. In this case, a memory diary can really help. If this sounds like you, it is highly recommended that you complete 2 weeks (or more) of a memory diary (see example on the next page). By reviewing this diary you will be able to gain better insight into your memory issues, and you can decide which areas you want to work on.

Top Tip:

Ask a friend or family member to support you to complete your diary.

~ *Example Memory Diary* ~

Monday	Had new medication prescribed – couldn't remember why when I got home. Wife had to ring GP.
Tuesday	Still can't remember name of new person at work – getting embarrassing now. Forgot to bring ID badge to work.
Wednesday	Forgot to charge phone last night – alarm didn't go off. Forgot to take bins out.
Thursday	Out shopping – forgot to buy loo roll.
Friday	Forgot to take my morning medication. Forgot I was going for drinks with work tonight. Didn't bring spare outfit.
Saturday	Forgot that the cat had an appointment at the vet.
Sunday	Forgot sister's birthday.

Activity:

Look at the things the person above has forgotten. Consider how these issues could be avoided – jot down some ideas below:

For more information see pages 9-12.

Factors that affect memory

Certain things affect our ability to remember things. Can you make any changes to the factors below?

Negative effects:

Fatigue

If we are tired or worn out our memory is affected.

Poor attention/concentration

We need to be able to focus and attend to the information for us to be able to store and recall it. Trying to do too many things at once means we are not paying enough attention to the things we need to remember.

Lack of confidence

If we are not confident in our abilities and doubt ourselves, we are more likely to forget things.

Pressure, stress or anxiety

Being under pressure or feeling stressed is likely to have a harmful effect on your memory. If we stay calm and are patient, we are more likely to recall/retrieve information.

Positive effects:

Emotional links to the information

Information that has personal meaning or emotional links to us is more likely to be recalled.

Repetition

If we use information regularly and repeatedly, we are more likely to recall it.

Structure, routine and organisation

If you are well organised and your life is well structured with a good routine, you will find you may have less memory difficulties than if your life is chaotic.

How to support memory

There are a number of ways to live better despite your memory problems. These are called *memory strategies*.

They are either internal strategies (things you learn to do inside your own head), or external strategies (using things outside of yourself to help).

Internal Strategies

Top Tip:

*For these strategies to work at their best, make them meaningful to you.
If things are personal to us, or a bit bizarre or funny, then we are much
more likely to remember the imagery, story or rhyme.*

- **Making associations.**
E.g. Remembering the name of a new colleague called Catherine by linking the name to a friend of yours at school also called Catherine.
- **Chunking (group like items together).**
E.g. Remembering items on a shopping list by sorting them into categories (e.g. fruits, vegetables, meat).
- **Making mental pictures.**
E.g. Remembering the name Thomas Barlow by making an image in your head of Thomas the Tank Engine with the face of Gary Barlow.
- **Rhymes.**
E.g. we all know the common rhyme to remember the number of days in each month (“30 days has September....”)

- **Repetition.**

E.g. After you hang up the phone, repeat the message to yourself. And then repeat, repeat, and repeat some more!

- **Spaced Retrieval (similar to repetition)**

It is helpful to work with a friend, family member or App. They will ask you a question (e.g. What is your PIN?) which you will answer. Initially leave only a short gap (5-10mins) before asking again, but eventually the time between questioning/repeating will increase (to days or weeks).

- **Mnemonics (using the first letter of each word in a sentence).**

E.g. “Richard **O**f York **G**ave **B**attle In **V**ain” is commonly to remember the order of the colours of the rainbow (**R**ed, **O**range, **Y**ellow, **G**reen, **B**lue, **I**ndigo, **V**iolet).

- **Create stories.**

E.g. To remember the door access code “C5128C” you could tell yourself this story “**C**arlos, a **51**year old man, has got **28** pet **C**ats”.



*Use the **Action Plan** template on page 17 to note down any Internal Strategies you want to try out in your day-to-day life.*

External Strategies



Diaries: Great for appointments and reminders. They are portable, so you can take them with you and check whenever / wherever you are.

Journals: If you struggle with longer term memory then a journal could help, where you write down things that have happened that day, or conversations you have had.



Calendars:

Put in a prominent place, so that you look at it regularly throughout the day. You could use colours to categorise activities.



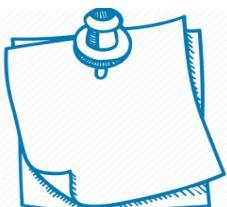
Whiteboards / blackboards:

These are great for upcoming appointments or 'to do' lists. Put it in a prominent place to ensure you check it regularly throughout the day.



Phone Alarms/Alexa device:

Set regular, daily alarms (e.g. check calendar, clean teeth, take bins out, etc.) Set alarms for appointments – remind you to get ready and leave in time, bring homework, etc.



Labels / post-it notes:

Label cupboards, drawers to show where items are kept. Leave post-its on mirrors or on the kettle as reminders. You can use pictures or words.



Organisational systems:

Folder with dividers; or email / computer folders.

Store letters, bills, important documents; all organised into sections. This keeps all essential paperwork in one place.



Organise your home:

If you often misplace or lose things, try organising your home in order to support your memory. E.g. keep your morning medication by the kettle so you see it when you make your morning cuppa; *always* put your keys on the hook; put your shopping list next to your wallet.

Take Action:

*Are there any of these strategies you could begin to use TODAY?
Use the 'Action Planning' sheet on Page 17 to support you to make some
lifestyle changes and begin to build new habits straight away!*

Attention

Attention is a key cognitive (thinking) skill. It is the **foundation** of all new learning and memory. It is important for us to improve our attention in order to improve our memory.

People with attention problems often say that they can no longer concentrate on reading books, or having multiple conversations; or they might say that they have difficulty studying for any length of time.

There are different types of attention:



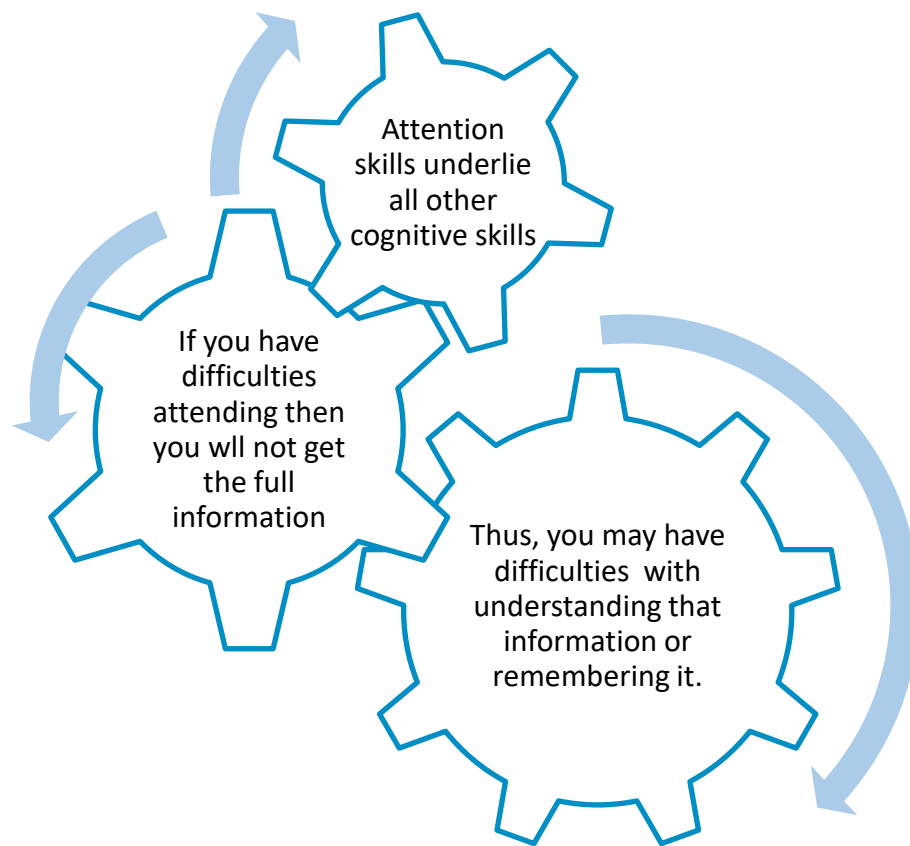
Sustained attention: refers to concentrating for prolonged periods of time on the same thing, such as studying, watching television or reading. If you have problems with sustaining attention then you may feel your 'mind drifts off' or you get distracted and end up thinking of something else.



Selective attention: involves selecting one aspect of our environment and ignoring or filtering out all the background noise or other distractions. You may have difficulty filtering out irrelevant distractions if you have problems with selective attention.



Divided attention: is the ability to pay attention to two or more things at the same time. If you have problems with dividing attention you will have difficulty with switching your attention very rapidly from one source to another. For example listening to what a teacher is saying and taking notes at the same time.



How to improve attention

There are lots of ways that you can begin to improve your ability to attend to things. Remember: by improving your *attention* you will also be improving your ability to *remember*.

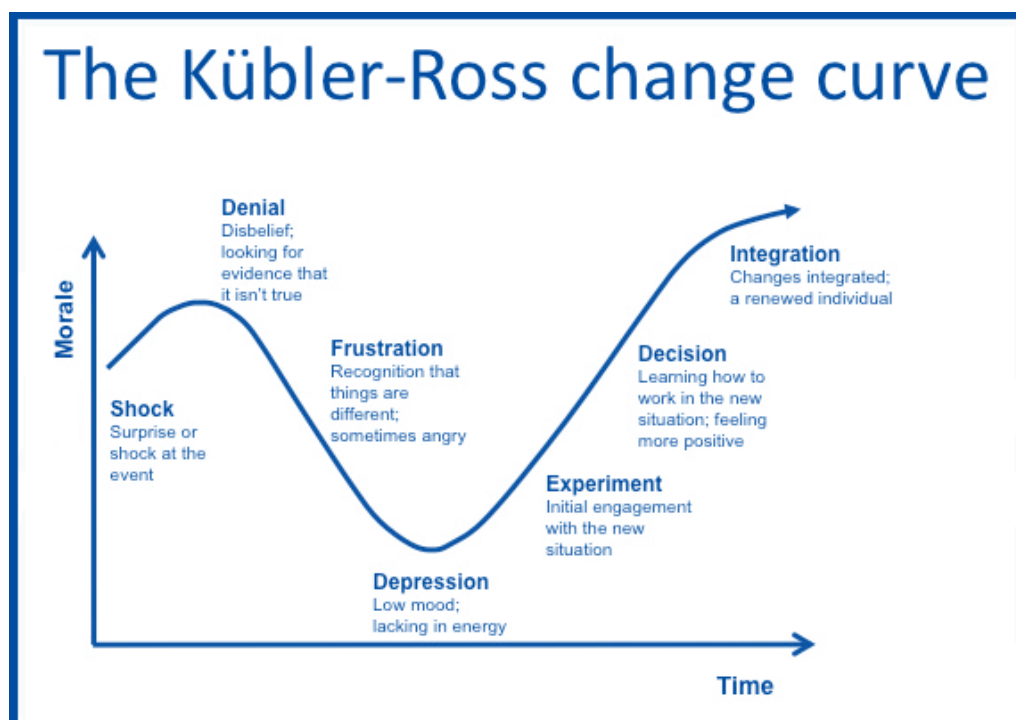
- Focus on tasks for a short time. Don't over-do it.
- Have a balance of activity in the day- work, rest and enjoyable activities.
- Take regular breaks- fresh air, change of position, drink, snack.
- Try to decrease stress/worry/tension through relaxation techniques. Try to empty your mind to give the task your full attention
- Shut out distractions - turn off phone, TV, radio.
- Take time out from others if overwhelming.
- Start small and for a short time eg, reading again.
- Prep and plan - organise your environment.

Change and Acceptance

We know that change is an inevitable part of life; but dealing with change when it is related to your health or memory can be a very difficult thing to accept and adjust to. Difficulty with adjusting can negatively affect your mood.

‘Acceptance’ means allowing the frustration to come and go as part of the natural process of loss/change, while dropping the struggle with it. By not getting caught up in the frustration, it becomes easier for your feelings to come and go without you getting ‘stuck’ in a negative place. This will also help your memory.

The **Kubler-Ross Change Curve** is a useful diagram to help us understand change and the normal human emotions associated with it.



Talking to your therapist or psychologist can help move through this cycle; as well as working on strategies to challenge negative thinking and increase positive action.

Activity: Where do you think you are on this change curve this week?

Personal Action Plan

Changing your lifestyle and building new habits can be a long-term challenge. A successful approach will need to take into account our individual circumstances. Setting goals can help us make the changes we want to make.

Example Action Plan:

Action 1:

I will complete 2 weeks of a memory diary this week to try to understand my issues better. I will share this with my son.

Action 2:

I will make up a rhyme to remember which days I need to pick my granddaughter up from nursery.

Action 3:

I will put my medication next to the kettle so I will remember to take it each morning before food.

Action 4:

I will start using a shopping list.

Action 5:

I will improve my stress levels by doing a daily meditation – this will help my wellbeing and memory.

Action 6:

I will remember to take the bins out each week this month without my husband telling me. I will set a phone alarm to make sure I am reminded.

My Personal Action Plan

Action 1:

Action 2:

Action 3:

Action 4:

Action 5:

Action 6:

Action 7:

Action 8:

How to support someone with memory difficulties: information for family & friends

Memory problems are very common for anyone who has a neurological condition. It is unlikely in most cases that these memory problems will get better. This manual is intended as a starting point in educating and empowering people to learn strategies to manage their memory problems in day to day life. Family, friends and carers are vital in supporting lifelong changes. But supporting someone with memory difficulties can be hard.



You can help by doing the following:

Learn

Learn as much as you can about how memory problems affect people with neurological conditions. Reading the information in this manual is a good starting point. You can also access information from support organisations such as Stroke association, Headway, MS Society, Parkinsons Charity.

Understand

Having memory problems is difficult for the person experiencing them. Everyone experiences memory problems at some point in their life, and if it has happened to you, you will know it can be frustrating and embarrassing. Imagine you experienced it frequently, all day, every day in every situation you are faced with – this might help you to understand to some extent what a person with a neurological condition is going through. Memory problems are often hidden and not obvious like a difficulty with walking or talking. Therefore it is a little bit harder to spot and understand.

Be patient

Learning to manage memory problems will not happen quickly – it will require small changes to be made over a long period of time. It will involve a change in routines and habits of a lifetime. Patience is required!

Listen

Often family, friends and carers do things with good intentions, but these are not always necessarily the things that someone with memory problems finds useful. For example if someone has left a pile of papers in a specific place you might think you are helping them by tidying them away to a safe place – however this means that they cannot then be quickly found when needed. Other strategies may involve a change to your living environment or lifestyle – e.g. a white board on the wall, post it notes around the house... This may not be how you like things to be, but if you understand why certain things need to be in the environment it might help you to accept them.

Support

Recognise you have an important role in helping your friend/family member accept, adjust to, and manage their memory problems. Try to support as much as you can with any changes that are required to the daily routine, or the layout of the home environment. Remember, success in managing the memory problems will benefit both of you. Assist in using external aids to support memory.

Be realistic

Try not to place unrealistic expectations on your family member/friend to be able to do things as they did before. Try not to add to stress or anxiety by expecting too much or asking them to do too much. But also do not treat them like an invalid, and do everything for them, as this is also counterproductive. Work together and communicate about what works best for everyone in the family/household - teamwork will have the best results.

Further Reading / Information

Useful Websites / Resources:

- Headway – Information on Brain Injury and Memory:
<https://www.headway.org.uk/about-brain-injury/individuals/effects-of-brain-injury/memory-problems/>
- MS Society – Information on Memory and Thinking for people with MS:
<https://www.mssociety.org.uk/about-ms/signs-and-symptoms/memory-and-thinking>
- Stroke Association – Information on Stroke, Memory and Thinking:
<https://www.stroke.org.uk/stroke/effects/cognitive/memory-and-thinking>
- Parkinson's UK – Information on Parkinson's, Memory and Thinking:
<https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/information-and-support/mild-memory-and-thinking-problems>
- The Brain Tumour Charity – Information on Brain Tumours and Memory:
<https://www.thebraintumourcharity.org/living-with-a-brain-tumour/side-effects/memory-difficulties-and-brain-tumours/>

YouTube Videos:

- “Techniques to Enhance Learning and Memory: Nancy D. Chiaravalloti” -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JbLAGpQ9RXg>
- “Chunking: Learning Technique for Better Memory and Understanding” -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hydCdGLAh00>
- How To Master Spaced Repetition and Improve Your Memory -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5PLO4XAXhs>
- How does your memory work? | Head Squeeze -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TUoJc0NPajQ>

Books / Workbooks:

- “The Brain Injury Rehabilitation Workbook” - R. Winson, B. Wilson, A. Bateman
- “The Brain Injury Workbook: Exercises for Cognitive Rehabilitation” – Trevor Powell

Films / TV:

- “The Mind Explained - Memory” – Netflix Series (Episode 1).