

## The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

### Taking Steps To Minimize Memory Loss

from the American Counseling Association

Everybody forgets things at times. But as we age most of us may become aware that our memories are not quite as sharp as they once were. We may find it happening more often that we forget where we left our car keys or those darn reading glasses, or even why we just walked into the kitchen.

It's even more frightening these days as we have all become more aware of Alzheimer's disease, an illness currently affecting more than 5.5 million Americans and this nation's sixth leading cause of death.

While memory loss is often one of the first signs associated with Alzheimer's disease, the symptoms, which can vary from person to person, can include difficulty in word-finding, vision and spatial issues and impaired reasoning and judgment. But simply having trouble recalling things at times, especially as one ages, is not necessarily an indication of this serious illness.

There are many things that can affect our memory function. Getting older is a primary one. Some memory loss is a natural part of the aging process, according to experts. But other factors, many of which we can control, can also contribute to the problem.

A good starting point is to have a health check done. Certain drugs can affect our memory. Cholesterol, our blood pressure and some illnesses may also impact memory.

When those issues are addressed, it's time to take actions to help fight memory loss. Avoiding smoking and heavy alcohol use are important ones. Studies show smokers perform much worse than non-smokers on memory and brain skills tests.

It also helps to eat right. Studies have found that a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, but low in fat and cholesterol, appear to improve brain health. Similarly, foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids, like tuna and salmon, may help the brain.

Staying physically fit can also play a big role in improving memory. Physical exercise increases blood flow to the brain, improving brain health and function.

Exercising your brain also helps. Reading, writing, doing puzzles, playing games and using online "brain exercise" programs appear to stimulate brain cells and the connections between the cells.

Being proactive can help improve memory function, but if you still find you're forgetting more frequently, repeating yourself in conversations, or being confused by a familiar activity, talk to your doctor and make sure it's not a more serious problem.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcorner@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcorner@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org).*

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