

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

### Are There Ways To Fight Memory Loss?

from the American Counseling Association

Each of us, regardless of age, forgets things. As teenagers we often "forgot" we were supposed to clean out the garage or be home by 11, though it usually bothered our parents more than it did us. But as we age we begin to notice that our memory may really be a little less sharp. That can be frightening, since we've all heard about Alzheimer's disease and early onset Alzheimer's, and may feel anxious that's our problem.

While Alzheimer's is a very serious disease, with no known cure or treatment, the fact that your memory sometimes is a bit hazy is not necessarily an indication of the illness. Today about 5.3 million Americans suffer from Alzheimer's and about 200,000 of them experience early onset Alzheimer's (affecting someone under 65).

What most of us face is not Alzheimer's, but simply growing older. Experts tell us that some memory loss is a natural part of the aging process. While we all forget things now and then (like those stupid car keys), it usually is after age 70 that most people notice it may be happening more frequently.

Fortunately, there are things you can do to combat the natural memory loss of getting older.

One is to avoid smoking and heavy alcohol use. A Harvard Medical School study found that smokers perform much worse than non-smokers in memory and thinking skills test.

Experts also advise watching your diet. A diet rich in fruits and vegetables, but low in saturated fat and cholesterol, may improve brain health. They also suggest that foods high in omega-3 fatty acids, like salmon and tuna, can help the brain.

Staying physically and mentally active will also fight memory loss. Physical exercise increases blood flow to the brain, which again means better brain health and function.

Exercising the brain itself also helps. An active social life is one way to do that. Activities like puzzles, reading, writing, playing games and using online "brain exercise" programs appear to stimulate brain cells and the connections between the cells.

You might also want a health check. Your drugs, cholesterol, blood pressure, or some diseases, can all play a role in memory loss.

If you're forgetting more frequently, find yourself repeating yourself in the same conversation, or being lost when faced with a familiar activity, it could be more serious. Talk to your doctor or a professional counselor for an evaluation.

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

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