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### Feedback

We welcome any suggestions you have, please send your **comments, concerns and compliments** to: **PALS, Patient and Carer Experience Team**, Trust Headquarters, Redesmere, Countess of Chester Health Park, Liverpool Road, Chester CH2 1BQ.

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## Ideas for coping with memory difficulties

Whilst compiling this handout we were encouraged that research suggests that relatives and friends are keen for practical suggestions to help support people with memory difficulties. (1)

## Remembering names

Remembering peoples' names is a common problem for people with memory difficulties and it can also cause anxiety. 'Anxiety may be reduced and confidence/well-being improved by saying, 'sorry I can't remember your name.'<sup>(2)</sup> Here are some other ideas to help you to remember peoples' names:

- When first meeting someone, make a point of concentrating on their name and repeat it over in your mind. Repeat it back to them "Hello James nice to meet you". This may help it stick in your mind.
- If a person has unusual or striking features, use this to help remember them by association e.g. James with the beard. Relatives can help with this too. It can also be useful to think about the situation in which you met them. <sup>(3)</sup>
- Keep a photo album of family and friends and, if possible, regular visitors e.g. home care, with their name clearly printed underneath for you to refer to.

## Remembering where you are

This is a very common problem for people with memory problems and can be frightening and disorientating, especially if you are in an unfamiliar place. Here are some helpful ideas:

- Stick to the same routes and places you are familiar with and confident going to when you are alone. Again, a routine can be helpful. <sup>(7)</sup>
- If you are visiting relatives and friends and are worried you may be unfamiliar with their home, ask if it is possible to stick clear temporary labels on the doors to tell you where each room is. This may save any embarrassment or confusion.
- If visiting overnight it may be useful to ask if a light can be left on in the hall and bathroom or even a low light in your own bedroom.

## Remembering where you have put things

Loosing things such as keys, remote controls, spectacles, purses and credit/debit cards can be very frustrating. Here are some ideas to help stop this from happening:

- Try to be organised. Try to keep things in the correct place and return them after they have been used e.g. hook for keys, particular place for spectacles and tablets.
- Use written prompts such as postcards stuck with blue tack or Post-it notes to remind you where things are kept.

Studies suggest using memory aids can be effective in helping people manage their memory difficulties on a day to day basis. <sup>(4)</sup>

## Remembering messages and information

Trying to remember what people have told you or what you have told them can be difficult. Here are some ideas to help:

- Keep a pen and notepad by the telephone and write down messages.
- When someone tells you something repeat it to yourself to help retain the information.
- Tell the other person that you might forget and ask them to write it down for you e.g. appointments.
- Try and act on information or requests as soon as possible or write it down.

## Remembering things you have to do

Organising yourself can be difficult if you have problems remembering what you have to do e.g. attending appointments, staying in for visitors, or carrying out routine tasks like putting out the bins.

One recent study discusses 'managing forgetting' <sup>(5)†</sup> and mentions the usefulness of writing things down and using cues.

- Keep a calendar and get into the habit of using it to write down appointments.
- Write a prompt to remind you to look at the calendar each morning and a prompt to remind you to cross off the date on the calendar before you go to bed. Keep the calendar in a prominent place so that you can refer to it throughout the day.
- Use clocks and alarms to remind you of things you need to do e.g. to take medication, to get ready to go out. Leave a note telling you why you have set it.
- Some clocks tell you the time and date. This may be helpful to have close to your calendar.
- Write things down that you need to remember e.g. shopping lists, jobs, telephone calls. Have a special notebook and pen to keep lists of things you need to do. Cross them off as you do them. Keep the notepad in the same place all the time.
- Keep a diary. This may help you remember events and occasions that you may have forgotten or you have already carried out or attended. This may help remind you what you have done e.g. events attended and bills paid. It may also be useful for family and friends to write in this for you e.g. that they have visited or are planning to take you out.
- Put notes on display in strategic places e.g. by the front door saying "do not forget your keys" or by the medicine cupboard saying "take your tablets at 4.00pm".
- It has been suggested that people with memory difficulties are more prone to stress and a change in routine or being in an unfamiliar place can increase stress therefore try to have a routine and stick to it. <sup>(6)</sup> A weekly timetable of jobs you have to do or social events you regularly attend displayed by the calendar might be useful e.g. bins out Monday, shopping Tuesday.
- Use a memo board or notice board to display things such as bills to be paid or repeat prescriptions. If someone helps you with letters and bills it may be useful to put these in a clearly labelled box straight away then they know where to find them.
- Finally, never put off doing anything until later if you remember it now!

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<sup>†</sup>Parsons-Suhl K, Johnson ME, McCann JJ, Solberg S (2008). Losing One's Memory in Early Alzheimers Disease. *Qualitative Health Research*. 18 (1), 31-42 <sup>(5)</sup>



## Safety and security issues

It is important to make sure you keep safe and secure. Here are some points for you to consider:

- It is advisable to have smoke detectors fitted. You can contact the fire service to ask for a free fire safety check.
- Make a notice of security/safety checks to be made each evening e.g. lock doors, shut windows, turn off appliances.
- Keep a list of important contact numbers by the telephone in case of emergencies.
- Always ask for identity badges if someone unfamiliar comes to the door. Do not let them in if they are unfamiliar or do not have a valid identity badge.
- Try to arrange for payments to be made directly into your bank account and have direct debits organised to pay your bills on time. Then you will not have large amounts of money to worry about.

## Maintaining your well being

***Although you may be experiencing memory problems it is important to try and stay independent and keep doing things that are part of your everyday life, especially activities that you enjoy. You may find that some tasks are more difficult than they used to be but with a little support or prompting from family/friends you may still be able to do them.***<sup>(8)</sup>

- Word skill games such as crosswords or word searches may help keep your mind sharp. Examples of other activities to help with concentration are jigsaws, drawing/painting, dominos, draughts, etc

- Try to find time to relax each day. You may wish to watch a favourite television programme or DVD. Sometimes people find listening to music helps them to relax. Tension may make your ability to concentrate worse.
- Keeping up your social contacts may be good for your well being.

'Past memories can be stimulated and well-being enhanced through reminiscence and creative expression activities that include topics of interest to the person' <sup>(9)</sup>

1. Make up an album of memories. You could include photographs, a record of your life history e.g. when and where you were born, where you went to school/worked etc. You could include important dates or events in your life.
2. Make a memory box with personal belongings e.g. photographs or anything which is meaningful to you and may trigger memorable events.

These types of aids have been proven to be useful to stimulate varied topics of conversation with all involved. <sup>(10)</sup>

Participants in one particular study discussed how they 'work to maintain their general health and well-being physically, intellectually and emotionally.' <sup>(11)</sup><sup>∇</sup>

Activities such as established hobbies e.g. gardening, walking and music can offer pleasure and take peoples' minds off other worries.<sup>(12)</sup>

In terms of general well-being, research has indicated that engagement in activities such as those mentioned above can be helpful.<sup>(13)</sup>

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<sup>◇</sup> Small JA, Perry J (2005). Do You Remember? How Care Givers Question Their Spouses Who Have Alzheimers Disease and the Impact on Communication. Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research. 48 (1), 125-136 <sup>(9)</sup>

<sup>∇</sup> Gilmour J A, Huntington O D (2005). Finding the balance: Living with memory loss. International Journal of Nursing Practice. 11 (3),118-124 <sup>(11)</sup>

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