

READ

Read this article about memory.

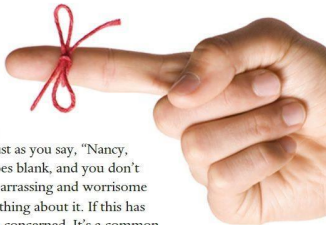
Try to Remember

You're with a friend, and suddenly up walks somebody you've known for a long time. You want to introduce this person to your friend. However, just as you say, "Nancy, I'd like you to meet . . ." your mind goes blank, and you don't remember the person's name. It's embarrassing and worrisome enough to make you want to do something about it. If this has happened to you, though, don't be too concerned. It's a common problem. As people get older, they tend to become more forgetful. They can't remember everyday details like computer passwords, email addresses, and their friends' names.

I used to worry about memory loss myself. Therefore, I decided to do some research into the problem, and I learned a number of interesting things about memory and how it works. I also discovered that even though memory loss is probably unavoidable, there are things you can do to slow it down.

How does memory work? First of all, there are two types of memory: long-term and short-term. Long-term memory refers to our memories of things that we experienced some time ago and that form the core of our knowledge of ourselves. In contrast, short-term memory can be called "working" memory—the type we use in processing such things as passwords and the names of new people we meet.

As we grow older, our long-term memory holds up remarkably well. Thus, we are able to remember the highlight of the vacation we took to the Everglades at the age of ten and the alligators we saw there. Meanwhile, our short-term memory tends to deteriorate. We



have difficulty remembering things like where we put our house keys because our short-term memory fails us.

Why does short-term memory decline? Short-term memory operations occur in the frontal lobes¹ of the brain. As people age, these lobes tend to lose mass, as much as 5 to 10 percent per decade. Short-term memory operations require space in order to function correctly. Therefore, as the lobes become smaller, short-term memory gets worse.

It is difficult or impossible to completely avoid memory decline. However, it can be slowed. Maintaining a steady supply of glucose² can mitigate the problem of shrinking lobes. Consequently, elderly people would do well to eat several small meals each day rather than two or three big ones. There is evidence, moreover, that staying mentally active can help sustain our memory and keep it from deterioration.

Many companies feed on our fears of memory loss, and they attempt to induce us to buy products that will supposedly enhance our ability to remember. Do these products work? Well, sometimes. But it's important to keep in mind that all memory aids depend on the creation of a peg, or mental picture, on which to hang something we want to recollect.

Suppose, for example, you have difficulty remembering names. Let's say you're at a party and are introduced to a woman named Sarah Baer. First, look for distinguishing features. You see that Sarah has long, thick hair, rather like a bear's fur. Second, think of words that will help you associate these features with this person. Baer = Bear. Furthermore, the first syllable of "Sarah" rhymes with "bear." Sar and Baer. It might work. The point is to create a mental picture you can relate to the person, place, or thing you want to recall. The more vivid the association is, the greater is the chance that you'll remember it.

Most importantly, memory improvement takes work. The real problem in remembering something we learned is often the fact that we weren't paying enough attention when we learned it. Think about the last time you were introduced to someone whose name you immediately forgot. Were you really paying attention to the person's name, or were you focusing on the impression you might be making? Memory courses can work, of course, but they depend on techniques we can create and perform for ourselves. The real trick lies in our willingness to tap³ and use what's within us.

1 lobes: rounded parts of organs
2 glucose: a natural form of sugar
3 tap: take from an available source

AFTER YOU READ

A VOCABULARY Match the words in bold with their meanings.

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| ___ 1. Companies often induce us to buy their products. | a. remember |
| ___ 2. Long-term memory forms the core of our self-knowledge. | b. best aspect |
| ___ 3. We are able to remember the highlight of our vacation. | c. cause, make |
| ___ 4. A steady supply of glucose can mitigate the problem. | d. sharp, clear, colorful |
| ___ 5. Meanwhile, our short-term memory tends to deteriorate . | e. improve |
| ___ 6. Memory aids can enhance our ability to remember. | f. make less harmful |
| ___ 7. We need a peg to help us to recollect something important. | g. become worse |
| ___ 8. The more vivid the image is, the better you'll remember. | h. central part |

B COMPREHENSION Read the statements. Check (✓) True or False. Correct the false statements.

	True	False
1. Forgetting things such as another person's name is quite uncommon.	☐	☐
2. Long-term memory refers to things we experienced some time ago.	☐	☐
3. Short-term memory can be termed "working" memory.	☐	☐
4. Our short-term memory holds up better than our long-term memory.	☐	☐
5. Memory problems are generally short-term memory problems.	☐	☐
6. Elderly people should eat several small meals daily.	☐	☐
7. There is no evidence that staying mentally active can slow memory deterioration.	☐	☐
8. A key reason we forget things is that we often weren't paying enough attention when we learned something.	☐	☐

C DISCUSSION Work with a partner. Compare and justify your answers in B. Do you agree with the statement in the reading that our long-term memory holds up better than our short-term memory? Discuss.