

*Living Well After  
Brain Cancer Treatment  
Education Series*

# Managing Memory



When working to improve your memory, it is helpful to begin with an understanding of your learning preferences and with systems that you may already have in place. Here are some things to consider:

- **Is fatigue the main issue?** Fatigue can interfere with your ability to absorb or recall information. Address fatigue first and know how to recognize when you are too fatigued to learn or remember well. See the section on *Managing Cognitive Fatigue* in this series.
- **What is your learning and recall style?** When learning or recalling information, some people like to ‘hear’ it, others like to ‘see’ it, others are hands on and like to ‘feel it’. Think about something you remember easily. Do you see the image as a picture or do you hear it being said? Knowing your strengths and learning patterns can be helpful when developing your plan to strengthen your memory.
- **What memory strategies do you already use?** Think about the strategies and systems you already rely on to remind you (ex. calendars, designated places for items, email reminders, to-do lists, etc.). Starting with what is already known can make the process less overwhelming.
- **What works for you?** You may notice certain times and situations that make it harder or easier to remember information. Try using these situations as learning opportunities to help you learn what works for you. Consider getting input from your loved ones too. Use a tracking system to help you such as the Memory Strategy Tracking process below:

Many people with brain cancer have memory issues due to the disruption of neural pathways. This can have a real impact on daily activities and relationships. Memory is a complex process so there are numerous strategies which can help. *Have self-compassion and patience with yourself. Rebuilding neural pathways takes time and practice.*

What was going on when I forgot something?	What didn't work?	The strategy I will use to improve my memory for this information...	Was this strategy successful? What should I change?
I forget where my keys are when I need to leave the house.	I don't have a designated place for my keys. I do have one for wallet, which has been helpful.	Have a designated place for keys.	I got out of the house sooner, because my wallet was in its place.

## Managing Memory (cont.)

Here are some specific strategies that others have found helpful for remembering information. You might pick and choose to start. It is not necessary to attempt all of these at once or in any particular order.

### Make it Personal

**Associate new with known information.** This is a great technique for remembering people's names. The sillier the better! For example, if you meet someone named Alice and you might try to picture her wearing a dress like the one worn by *Alice in Wonderland*.

**Create an emotional connection.** Link your new information to a personal feeling to recall it better. Strong emotional connection to the information can help you to remember it better.

**Do something creative.** You are more likely to remember things that are novel. For example, when you park your car, sing a fun song or do a little dance that incorporates key landmarks to make it stick in your mind. Have fun with it!

### Make it Clear

**Learn when most alert.** Plan your important meetings during times when you are most cognitively fresh.

**Use reminders.** Watches, phone alarms, timers and electronic calendar reminders can notify you of important tasks at specific times (medications, appointments, etc.). Consider placing sticky notes in places that will be noticed when you need a reminder. For example, a note on the car steering wheel can remind you to pick up groceries on the way home from work.

**Minimize distractions.** You can create an environment that supports learning! Turn off non-essential electronic notifications. Declutter your visual environment. Try to do just one thing at a time.

**Rehearse.** Repeat the new information several times. This can be done verbally (say it aloud to yourself) or mentally (taking a few moments to take a mental snapshot).

**Ask questions.** It's ok to ask others to repeat information, say it in a different way or get clarification on what was said.

**Use multi-sensory techniques** to aid learning. For example, when learning a new task, in addition to listening to verbal instruction, you can say it aloud, visualize yourself doing it, or practice doing it. If helpful, ask others to offer important information in more than one format.

### Make it Organized

**Have one calendar and review frequently.** Be consistent about keeping time-sensitive information in one place, such as a daily planner. Get into a habit of checking the planner frequently. Reviewing notes while reading them in your head or outloud will help the memory storage process.

**Group things together.** Associating things that naturally go together can make them easier to remember- for example, taking your medications with meals. Also try mnemonics to make remembering information easier

**Have a central notice board** to help remind loved ones of joint tasks- this can be useful to reduce confusion and missed information. Remind others to look at it frequently.

**Use an organized and categorized system.** Consider labels on drawers and using categories to file information so you know where to look for each. Try to use similar categories across paper and electronic platforms. Caregivers or professionals can help.

**Create an assigned place for items.** Have an assigned place for items and consistently putting items back can be helpful, i.e. basket for keys by the door, medications in bathroom drawer, etc.