

Memory is what gives meaning to our lives. At its most basic, it tells us whether we are in a familiar safe place – or whether we need to be afraid or run away.

Memory is what most people think about when they think about Alzheimer's disease. Although everyone with Alzheimer's disease has a memory problem, most people with memory problems do not have Alzheimer's disease. That is why doctors need to look at other brain functions to decide if a person with a memory complaint has Alzheimer's disease.

## Understanding the Symptom

In its most basic sense, memory can be divided into two types: a 'short term' store and a 'long term' store. The short term store is memory that is related to events that are presently occurring such as you reading this sentence or talking on the phone. The long term store describes memory of past events and experiences – the memory of how to do things such as, riding a bicycle, and language based memory, such as knowing that the sky is blue or knowing when your birthday is.

The major brain chemical that is responsible for forming memories is called acetylcholine or Ach. People with Alzheimer's disease have low levels of Ach. Drugs that are used to treat Alzheimer's disease increase the amount of Ach by inhibiting the brain enzymes that break it down.

## Managing Memory of Recent Events

Loss of memory is one of the earliest signs of dementia and affects almost every aspect of daily life. It is important to know what to expect and how to deal with this challenging symptom which is why DementiaGuide offers you these practical tips from our Symptom Library for managing difficulties with memory of recent events:

- **Gently prompt as needed.** The person with dementia may need prompts in order to recall names of people in conversation or to complete a task. Kindly reminding the person of the next step of their task, handing them the item(s) needed to complete the next part, or reintroducing yourself during conversation are some of the ways that this can be done.
- **Consider the time of day.** The person with dementia may find it extra difficult to remember things when they are tired. If so, avoid tasks which require a lot of memory ability such as visiting friends during these times. The person may need you to provide prompts more often if such activities cannot be avoided.
- **During conversation:**
  - *Get their full attention.*
  - *Face the person and make eye contact.*
  - *Speak in a soft, calm voice.*
  - *Avoid using lengthy verbal instructions and complex sentences and vocabulary.*
  - *Break instructions into step-by-step tasks that can be completed individually (written out if they can understand what they read).*
- **Stay calm and patient.** Becoming upset or annoyed when the person you care for is having difficulty remembering something, you will only add to their frustration. Instead encourage the person to keep trying.

### About the Symptom:

A person with Alzheimer's disease or dementia may:

- Forget the topic of a conversation.
- Repeat themselves.
- Forget someone's name after introduction.
- Be unable to remember how they arrived somewhere.
- Leave a task incomplete because they have forgotten what they were doing.

### Doctor's Notes:

Until very old age (say about 95 years old) most people with memory complaints do not have dementia. How to sort out those who do and those who do not boils down to two features: does the person with a memory complaint also have impairment in other areas, such as language, calculation and attention and concentration? Do these impairments interfere with function?

A concerning symptom would be if a person could not remember an event at all, even with hints. Another concerning feature, would be a person repeatedly asking about recent (or upcoming) events.



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