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Rotman Research Institute

ACTIVE
AGING WEEK
INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON ACTIVE AGING
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Memory & Brain Health

Myth: Memory fails with age.

What does the research say?
It is not that simple. While some types of memory certainly do decline with age, some stay the same, and some even improve with age. For example, our *semantic* memory – memory for facts and information gained through experience – typically gets better with age. This is because healthy brains are capable of forming new semantic memories (or gaining new knowledge) at any age. The more we experience, the more we learn.

What does this mean for me? Your memory can still work well as you get older. If you are particularly good at remembering things based on a 'picture' in your mind, you might use this visual memory to compensate for areas where you're not as good in. For example, remembering names or numbers.

How do I apply this in my daily life? Connect information that you are trying to learn with older information that is already well-stored. For example, if trying to learn the name of a new neighbour, Shirley Walker, try to connect that name to someone you know well (e.g., your cousin Shirley) or think about the meaning of the name (e.g., a person who walks). Have fun with this to make it even more memorable – picture your new neighbour walking "surely" out her door.

Recommended Resources and Activities:

- The Baycrest [Memory and Aging Program](#)
- Practice Making Associations activity handout on page 3

Adapted from Troyer, A.K. & Vandermorris, S. (2012). Memory and Aging Program: Participant workbook. Baycrest Centre for Geriatric Care, Toronto. Available from the [e-store.](#)

Practice making associations

Making associations means actively connecting information you want to remember with information you already know. This is an effective way of learning something new. We all do this automatically from time to time. For example, it is easier to learn the name of someone you meet when they happen to share that name with a loved one of yours. Sometimes making associations isn't easy. The more you practice, the easier this will be.

For this exercise, you will practice creating associations for names and numbers. There are a number of ways you can do this:

1. Find a meaning. Many names have actual meanings: Belle means beautiful, Smith is a blacksmith.
2. Visualize a picture. The names Green and Frost conjure obvious pictures. Other names require more imagination. Picture "I lean" for Eileen and "angel" for Angela.
3. Connect a name with someone you already know. Think of acquaintances or famous people with the same names.
4. For numbers, create associations by looking for patterns or repetitions. To remember 6814, you could find a pattern such as 6+8=14

Let your imagination run wild! The more vivid the association, the more memorable the information will be. If you can, compare notes with others who have completed this exercise and see what you had in common, and where you had different ideas.

1. Can you make associations with these two names? Generate and explain an association for each name.

- Amy McDonald
- Bob Freedman

2. Let's try some more. Generate and explain an association for each name.

- Morris Gose
- Terumi Nishi

3. This strategy can also work for numbers. Can you make associations with these two numbers? Generate and explain an association for each number.

- 3065
- 33628