

# The Balancing Act

*Tips to Balance Your Life and Keep You Emotionally and Physically Fit*



## Memory Makeover:

### Tips To Spruce Up An Absent Mind

It's Monday morning. You have one minute before you have to leave for work, but can't find your keys. Ransacking your home in a frantic search, you finally locate the keys—right where you left them—on the kitchen counter. Breathless you hop on the bus and realize your lunch is still at home on the counter. Worse still, you spot a new coworker on the bus and can't remember his name.

Though days like these can leave you feeling like your brain is slowing down, polishing a dull memory is possible. The same way we exercise our muscles to keep fit, we have to continue to train our brain to maintain its efficiency over time.

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Boost brain power with these tried and true tactics:

### Ditch your multi-tasking ways.

Think you can successfully study the details of a report while talking on the phone *and* reading your horoscope? Think again. You need at least eight seconds of focused energy to digest information and store it in the brain's memory centre. So hang up the phone, find a quiet place and focus, focus, focus!

### Stay organized.

Many people overlook this critical step and end up missing important appointments, deadlines or critical details. Put pen to paper (or finger tips to a keyboard) and record important dates in a calendar, in a notebook or on your Blackberry. Recording and arranging data will help ingrain it in your memory, and gives you a point of reference in case you do forget.

### Get hooked on mnemonics.

Mnemonic devices boost memory through associations. Depending on the material and learning style you might use visual images, e.g. a black cat stuck in a well to remember the name "Blackwell," rhymes and alliteration (30 days has September, April, June and November is a prime example), acronyms, such as HOMES to remember the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie and Superior), or even jokes to recall important information. Chunking of data—such as breaking numbers into groups of three for information like your Social Insurance Number—is also a good way to help the brain stay on track.

### Take a guided tour.

Another old but proven mnemonic device is the 'method of loci.' This involves using a familiar route, e.g. the pathway through your home to your bedroom or the way to the corner store, as a way of remembering key details of a speech or the order of a complex task. Use each room or landmark on your journey to 'signpost' different parts of the speech or each step of the process you need to remember.

## Take a fresh perspective.

*Neurobics* help exercise and strengthen underused brain pathways. Keep those brain synapses firing by taking a new route home from work, using your non-dominant hand to brush your hair, challenging yourself with a crossword puzzle or taking a class in a completely foreign field of study.

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## Stay active.

Physical exercise boosts the amount of oxygen to your brain and can help lower your risk for diabetes, heart disease and depression—all of which can impede memory. It also promotes sleep, which can improve focus and help consolidate memories.

## Eat right.

Foods rich in **B vitamins**—including legumes, spinach, broccoli, strawberries and citrus fruits— **Omega-3 fatty acids**—like tuna, salmon, herring, flaxseed and walnuts—as well as **antioxidants** (vitamin C, E and beta carotene)—sweet potatoes, tomatoes, berries and green tea amongst others—are thought to improve brain function.

A great way to realize the potential of your brain and even increase your memory and learning abilities is based on the idea that by reflecting on how you think or ‘thinking about thinking’, you can learn how you best absorb knowledge. By making a conscious effort to review how you are thinking, consider how this way of thinking or storing information is working for you, and then ask yourself how well you did in recalling this information or how you could use your memory differently next time. In other words, use your personal experiences and strategies to memorize that seem to be best for you.



Everyone draws a blank from time to time. Young or old, forgetting is a natural part of life, but there are ways you can boost the power of the brain to keep you sharp no matter your age.

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