

Remember this: You can improve your memory

Worried because you searched a half hour before finding your reading glasses or car keys? Concerned that it took a couple minutes to remember the name of the familiar-looking woman who said hello to you in the restaurant?

You probably don't have much to worry about, said Dr. George Grossberg, an internationally recognized Alzheimer researcher and director of geriatric psychiatry at Saint Louis University School of Medicine. As annoying as it may be, temporary "tip of the tongue" forgetfulness is one of the changes that happens as we age.

"If, on the other hand, the information is important to us, isn't there when we want it, and doesn't ever come back to us, that's a more serious problem. The person who has Alzheimer's disease and misplaces her reading glasses probably won't even remember that she needs them to see. She knows the man next to her is familiar, but can't remember that he's her grandson and his name is Mark."

"In our society, we're all on chronic systems overload. We're multi-tasking – talking on our cell phones, listening for beepers to go off, walking into a store to shop," he said. "It's very easy for certain things to get lost in the shuffle. That's not Alzheimer's disease."

Dr. Grossberg offers this recipe for brain health:

- **Exercise your body.** Aerobic exercise improves your cardiovascular health. Exercise also increases your "feel-good" brain chemicals, which improve your mood and prevents depression which is a risk factor for Alzheimer's disease.
- **Exercise your mind.** Research shows mental challenge can help rewire connections in the brain. So find a new hobby, learn to play chess, use your left hand if you're right-handed, or study a foreign language.
- **Take care of yourself.** Control risk factors for cardiovascular disease such as high blood pressure, smoking, high cholesterol, and obesity to help decrease your risk.
- **Get a good night's sleep.** Not getting enough deep, restful sleep causes mental impairment later in life. Besides, if you're sleep deprived, you won't think clearly and are more likely to forget in the present time.
- **Feed your brain.** Some research shows antioxidant vitamins have protective powers against Alzheimer's disease. Some B vitamins, especially B12 and folate, are very important in how brain cells function. Talk with your doctor about taking vitamin supplements.
- **Check your meds.** Discuss, with your doctor, if any prescribed and over-the-counter medications you take could cause memory or concentration problems.

- **Try to figure out what is causing your forgetfulness.** Did you make a wrong turn while driving while you were talking on a cell phone and listening to the radio? Maybe you're trying to do too many things at once and need to put down the phone or turn off the tunes.

