



Memory loss

With short-term memory loss, you can't recall things learned in the past seconds to minutes. With long-term memory loss, you forget things learned in the distant past, such as in childhood. It is normal to have some memory loss as you age.

You may have a hard time recalling the name of a person or place, and say, "It is on the tip of my tongue." This memory loss is temporary and not severe. When it persists or interferes with your daily life, it can be a sign of a problem.



SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Signs and symptoms of serious memory loss, such as amnesia, depend on the cause. The memory loss can be partial or complete. It can occur for a short time or persist. It can also come on suddenly or slowly.

TREATMENT

Memory loss that persists, is severe, or that interferes with daily life needs a medical diagnosis. When another problem is the cause and is treated with success, memory loss improves. For other causes, such as Alzheimer's disease, there is no cure. The goal is to treat symptoms and provide safety and comfort.



CAUSES

Other than the normal memory loss that comes with aging, causes include:

- Depression
- Excess alcohol. Drug use.
- Side effects of some medicines
- Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. Dementias result in a decline of all areas of mental ability. This includes learning, problem solving, language, behaviors, and memory loss.
- Mild cognitive impairment. This is a medical illness. With this, people have abnormal memory for their age and education. They have a harder time learning new information or recalling things.
- Posttraumatic stress disorder
- Seizures
- Head trauma
- Stroke
- Brain infections or tumors



TRIAGE QUESTIONS



Is the person suddenly very confused or not aware of time, place, persons, and things?

NO
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YES ➔ **GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE**



Are these signs and symptoms of dementia present?

- Poor memory of recent events, etc.
- Making up stories to explain memory loss
- Getting lost in familiar places
- Not being able to finish tasks
- Social withdrawal or depression
- General confusion
- Behaviors that are paranoid, anxious, irritating, childlike, or rigid
- No interest in personal hygiene, grooming, or getting dressed
- Unclear speech

NO
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YES ➔ **SEE DOCTOR**



Are any of these problems present?

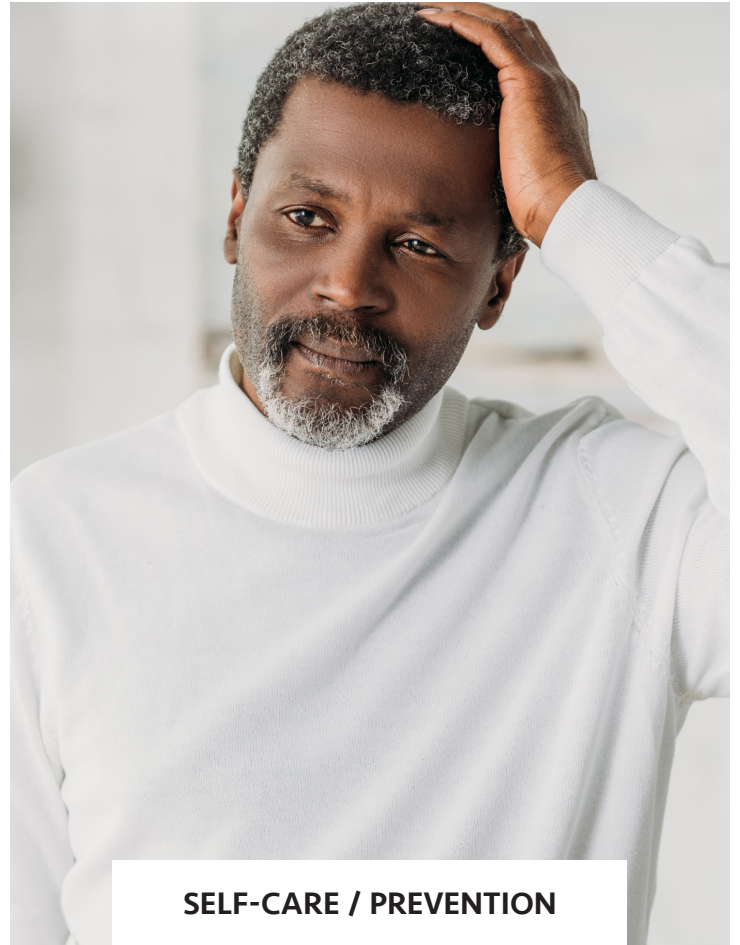
- Signs and symptoms of Alzheimer's disease
- Signs and symptoms of depression
- Memory loss that can't be explained

NO
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YES ➔ **SEE DOCTOR**



USE SELF-CARE



SELF-CARE / PREVENTION

Help Prevent Memory Loss

- Control blood pressure.
- Get regular exercise.
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet.
- Protect the head from injury.
- Don't smoke or use illegal drugs. Limit alcohol.
- Manage stress.
- Stay connected with social activities.
- Keep your mind active. Learn a new skill or hobby. Take or teach a class. Play games. Work or volunteer.
- Get regular eye exams. Get your hearing checked. If needed, wear eyeglasses and/or a hearing aid.

Help Remember Things

- Follow a routine for daily and weekly activities.
- Listen carefully. Link newly learned things to past memories.
- Repeat what you want to remember out loud. Write it down if you need to.
- Keep track of important things to do, phone numbers, etc. Use a calendar, planner, PDA, etc.
- Set up a system to remind you of daily medications to take, bills to pay, appointments to keep, etc.
- Put your keys, eyeglasses, etc. in the same place.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

NIH National
Institute on Aging
nia.nih.gov

