



Let me call you sweetheart...

I can't remember your name!

by Robin Wilson

Why is it that I can remember every word to 'Only You' by The Platters but not the password to my online bank account? Seriously. I found my car keys in the refrigerator last week. What's going on? Let's see: Stress? Check. Age? Well... I AM fifty-something. Too much on my plate? Who isn't pulled in a thousand directions these days! While I was pondering why my memory is so sketchy I decided to stop and do a little research before I...well before I forgot.

Did you know that we start to lose brain cells, a few at a time, while we're still in our 20's? No, I'm not talking about those fraternity parties or that brief period where we couldn't complete a sentence without using the phrase, "groovy". Beginning in our twenties our bodies start to make less of the chemicals our brain cells need to work. As we age, these changes can affect our memory.

See, your short-term and remote memories aren't usually affected by aging but your recent memory may be. For example, don't be offended if we should meet one day and after a wonderful conversation I say, "I'm sorry...tell me your name again?" The good news is these are completely normal changes. More good news is there are things you can do that will help you strengthen your memory and keep those remaining brain cells strong and healthy.

The American Academy of Family Physicians (www.aafp.org) suggests a few things to help us jog our memories such as: keeping lists, make associations (connect things in your mind), like using landmarks to help you find places, put important items (such as car keys) in the same place every time, repeat names when you meet new people and do things that keep your mind and body busy.

When is our 'fuzzy thinking' serious? Current medical thinking puts memory lapses into two categories. There's the occasional lapse of memory that has a traceable behavioral pattern or situation such as sleep deprivation, low blood sugar, illness, poor eating habits and acute stress. Here clarity returns when the 'crisis' is over. The more severe side of memory lapses could indicate an underlying serious mental or physical condition such as clinical depression, ADHD, post-traumatic stress disorder or brain trauma or disease. If memory lapses have become memory failure you should see your physician immediately.

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So, what can we do to un-fog our brains? One expert I found suggested we "reduce stress and learn positive coping mechanisms". Right. Obviously that is good advice although I don't know a soul who doesn't occasionally yield to stress, even those with excellent 'coping skills'. I kept searching and found some interesting, concrete things we can do that may help keep our gray matter firing on all cylinders.

Nutrition plays a tremendous role in brain function. Anyone who has sat through a long meeting on an empty stomach can attest to that. The B-complex vitamins, especially B1, B2, B6 and folic acid are critical to our capacity to reason, verbalize and remember. Foods rich in antioxidants (citrus fruits, green peppers, broccoli, carrots, sweet potatoes, whole grains, wheat germ and nuts, etc.) and essential fatty acids (salmon, tuna, mackerel and sardines) are thought to support optimal brain function by reducing inflammation and plaque production along nerve endings. The normal function of inflammation in our bodies is to help our immune system as it fights to protect us from foreign substances such as viruses, bacteria and toxins. However, inflammation, which occurs when there are no intruders to fight, especially in the brain, has been linked to Alzheimer's, ADHD and even strokes. The phrase 'food for thought' really does take on quite a literal meaning.

Another critical weapon in our fight the fog battle is oxygen. Actually make that OXYGEN,

OXYGEN and more OXYGEN. I'm not talking about stepping outside and taking a deep breath I'm talking about engaging in activities that pump oxygen through every piece of tissue in your body, into your lungs and blood vessels and yes, your brain. We know that exercise is good for us. It keeps us fit and limber. It keeps our weight normal and can reduce stress and blood pressure. Exercise is also a key player in cognition. Just as plaque on our arteries makes it difficult for blood to flow to our heart which could lead to a heart attack, not getting enough oxygen to our brains can lead to a build up of...let's call it brain plaque which could lead to a stroke. Quite literally a brain attack!

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Researchers at the Brain Research Centre at Canada's University of British Columbia tested this theory on mice. In one cage the mice breathed low-oxygen air for 16 hours a day for a month. The other cage of mice had normal oxygen levels. Enter the maze test and I think you can figure out for yourself which group had the worse performance.

Can't exercise like you use to? No problem. Just grab a good book and lie down...in a mild hyperbaric oxygen chamber that is. Approximately 3 feet tall and 8 feet long, a Mild Hyperbaric Oxygen (mHBO) chamber is a soft sided, tube like device with clear vinyl windows that allows you to recline comfortably while you read, watch a movie or just breathe. mHBO therapy is a process, which takes ambient air and pressurizes it to equal approximately 11 feet below sea level. When oxygen is delivered under pressure in

an mHBO chamber it floods our plasma, and is delivered through our blood vessels and arteries, into our lungs and other organs such as our BRAINS! Tiffany Watts, co-owner of Oxygen8, an mHBO treatment facility in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida has seen amazing results from her clients. "Something so simple and restful as an hour in one of our mHBO chambers can have such a dramatic affect on people's lives," says Watts. You can learn more about mild hyperbaric oxygen therapy by logging on to www.oxyeight.com

OK, what was I saying? I'm sorry, I was sidetracked there for a minute. So, the next time you wander in the kitchen and can't remember why you're there... grab a bowl of berries, take a deep breath, don't worry...it's probably just a few foggy brain cells acting out. ■

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