

# 10 Ways to Strengthen One's Memory and Combat Forgetfulness

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It is in human nature to be forgetful. An Arab proverb that states: "He is only called insaan (man) because of his forgetfulness (nasiyaan), and it is only called the heart (al-qalb) because it changes so rapidly (yataqallib)." The first one to forget (awwal anaasin) was the first man (awwal an-naas), meaning Adam ().

Forgetfulness is not necessary an illness nor a disease, however continuous lapses of memory and intermittent weakness may become as such and so we should not overlook the seriousness of the matter.

Abu Hurayrah () narrated that the Messenger () said: "There is no disease that Allah has created, except that He also has created its remedy." [Saheeh Bukhari 7/582]

Usamah ibn Shurayk () once asked the Messenger (): "... O Allah's Messenger; Should we seek medical treatment for our illnesses?' He () replied: 'Yes, you should seek medical treatment, because Allah, the Exalted, has let no disease exist without providing for its cure, except for one ailment, namely, old age'." [Sunan Tirmidhi ??]

Allaah () says: "Man was created weak." (Surah An-Nisaa 4:28) – This 'weakness' amongst others, is physical as well as intellectual and forgetfulness is something that varies from person to person and according to each individual's nature; some may be more forgetful than others and some of the things that are forgotten can be more serious than others.

As our nature comprises of the physical and spiritual self, it is essential that the two should be in harmony with one another. The spiritual component within man is mainly governed by the intellect (*`aql*) which differentiates us from the rest of creation. Memory is a fundamental component of the intellect.

Taking proper care of our health is an obligation and we should actively seek the means to combat any condition that hinders our well-being. We should all have trust in Allaah and search for cures and/or recommendations to alleviate the problem.

The following 10 points have been compiled to provide practical measures to combat forgetfulness. They are by no means exhaustive, but very simple steps that every Muslim can implement:

**1. Frequently remembering Allaah ().** Dua is our most potent defense against all struggles of life and we should ask Allaah for all of our needs. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): "...And remember your Lord when you forget..." [Surah al-Kahf 18:24] - Dua (both invoking and

supplicating) is conversing with Allah and it is the single most uplifting, liberating, empowering, and transforming conversation a person can ever have.

Dua is the weapon of a believer, it is more forceful than a sword. The first and foremost remedy lies in the remembrance of Allah whose help alone is sought.

**2. Keeping away from sin.** The effects of sin result, from amongst other things, in a bad memory and the inability to retain knowledge. The darkness of sin cannot co-exist with the light of knowledge. The following words of Imaam Shaafi'i reflect this reality: "I complained to (my shaykh) Wakee' about my bad memory. And he advised me that I should (abandon) keep away from sin. He said that the knowledge of Allaah is light, and the light of Allaah is not given to a rebellious/sinner."

Al-Khateeb al Baghdadee reported in al-Jaami' (2/387) that Yahya ibn Yahya said: "A man asked Maalik ibn Anas (Imaam Maalik), 'O Abu 'Abd-Allaah; Is there anything that will improve my memory?' He said, 'If anything will improve it, it is giving up sin.'"

When a person commits a sin, it overwhelms him and this leads to anxiety and sorrow which keeps him occupied with what he has done. This dulls his senses and distracts him from many beneficial things, including seeking knowledge.

**3. Not eating too much.** Eating too much is highly detrimental both physically and psychologically. It makes one lethargic that can lead to over-sleeping which in turn dulls the senses. The Prophet, (ﷺ) said: "A Believer eats in one intestine, whereas a non-believer eats in seven intestines" [Saheeh Muslim 3/5046] - Therefore it is not for us to eat till we are completely satiated; rather we should eat such that the hunger goes but there is still room for more.

Most of the diseases which we see result from food and drink and besides exposing oneself to the risk of heart diseases, wrong types of food (those high in acidity, saturated fat and low in carbohydrates etc.) can have a negative effect on the human 'place cells'. High blood pressure, having a heart disease, wrong diet or obesity, and lack of physical activity can be risk factors for memory problems. Too much acidic food is one of the causes of lethargy and weak memory.

Drinking plenty of water and a diet based on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and "healthy" fats will provide lots of health benefits, but such a diet can also improve memory. Research indicates that certain nutrients nurture and stimulate brain function. B vitamins, especially B6, B12, and folic acid, Antioxidants like vitamins C and E, and beta carotene, Omega-3.

**4. Foods of the Quran and Sunnah.** Islam has provided details of food that is blessed and with special properties and it is highly recommended that we all learn about the foods that Allaah (ﷻ) has mentioned in the Qur'an as each and every one of them provides a benefit and removes a harm.

Scholars have also described certain foods that increase the memory, such as drinking honey and eating raisins and certain types of nuts. Chewing certain kinds of gum resin is also mentioned. Imaam az-Zuhri said: "You should eat honey because it is good for the memory." He also said: "Whoever wants to memorize hadeeth should eat raisins." (From al-Jaami' by al-Khateeb 2/394).

Ibraaheem ibn ?? said, "You should chew resin gum, because it gives energy to the heart and gets rid of forgetfulness." (From al-Jaami' by al-Khateeb, 2/397) - Researchers and psychologists have written extensively on whether chewing gum can improve memory. They report that brain activity in the hippocampus (an area important for memory) increases while people chew. It is however, still unclear why this is the case.

**5. Reviving the practice of cupping (hijaamah).** Cupping is an Islamic tradition that is very much neglected or misunderstood. It refers to the extraction of impure blood from the body by means of cupping and is known to tangibly improve memory. The Prophet (ﷺ) said: "Healing is in three things: drinking honey, the incision of a cupper, and cauterizing with fire, but I forbid my Ummah to use cauterizing." [Saheeh Bukhari 5269]

The word 'healing' in this hadeeth is general and not restricted to any condition and scholars have explained a multitude of benefits related to cupping, sharpening memory is one of them. It is a Sunnah that needs to be revived amongst the masses and its benefits are well known from Islamic traditions and various Muslim cultures. (For more information see Al-Tibb al-Nabawi by Ibn al-Qayyim).

**6. Exercising frequently.** The merits of exercise - from preventing chronic health conditions to boosting confidence and self-esteem - are hard to ignore. We know about the physical benefits of exercise. It now appears that exercising can play a role in preventing memory loss as we age.

Medical research in this area shows that if you do regular physical activity you actually produce more oxygen that is delivered to your brain and the brain can use that oxygen to function better. Large amounts of physical activity in young adulthood or middle adult life can reduce risk of memory problems by 50%.

Regular exercise and physical activity (like walking and gardening etc.) are extremely important and beneficial for long-term health and well-being. It keeps the body and mind invigorated which in turn leads to the improvement

of psychological well-being. The right combination of exercise creates a hormonal environment conducive to strengthening memory.

**7. Keeping the mind stimulated.** Keeping the brain stimulated is essential in making sure that memory remains working effectively. The older we grow, our ability to recall from memory may begin to wane but keeping your mind occupied and mentally involved has a positive effect on boosting memory.

By keeping the mind active, we can help the cells work better and thus have a better memory and better problem solving skills. Reading, writing, traveling, keeping fit and generally being creative with your time are examples of how can work towards putting this point into practice. Try to learn at least one new thing each day.

Frequent tests and testing increase memory retention and has been an age-old proven method in homes and schools.

**8. Paying attention.** You can't be expected to remember what you never learn or notice. We sometimes forget because we simply did not pay enough attention when we first acquired the information. The main location for the transferring of information into memory is a portion of the temporal lobe called the *hippocampus*.

Memory-making is said to be a four-step process, namely; *sensory* memory, *working* memory, *short-term* memory, *long-term* memory. We sub-consciously accept and reject what we want to know and what we don't. Emotion and memory are very closely related and thus a portion of the emotion system of the brain is in charge of transferring information into memory. You will know this from your experience, for example, you go to the masjid and meet new people, which faces and incidents are you going to remember? The person who made you smile, the person who made you sad or the person who made you feel embarrassed? It will possibly be the one who had the biggest emotional impact.

Each of us knows his/her own attention-span better and therefore, we must continuously work to train ourselves become more attentive, whether it is in the school class room or in the masjid.

**9. Writing things down.** The simple act of writing things down cements it into our memories. And reviewing and revising what we learn at intervals is more effective than trying to cram the learning into one period of time.

Writing usually multiplies our ability to remember, including foreign vocabulary. The pro-active action of writing as opposed to the passive action of reading alone, directs our mind to rehearse what we learn. Therefore, writing is a learning tool that involves dual-process of learning at once (i.e.

writing and reading at the same time). There is a more mechanical and mental effort involved in the cooperation between mind and body.

**10. Being thankful to Allaah for His bounties.** No one expects us to become experts in understanding the nature of the brain and how it works. Neither is the scientific study of the brain a conclusive field (even for the experts). We simply need to understand what our brain needs in order to function properly and remain healthy.

Allaah () says in the Qur'an: "It is He who has created for you (the faculties of) hearing, sight, feeling and understanding; Little thanks it is that you give." [23:78]

We must never forget the infinite blessings that our Creator has bestowed upon us and we must not take them for granted. It is our duty to take care of them and to utilize them in the best manner for His pleasure.

To reiterate an earlier point; for every ailment, Islam has provided a cure and it is for us to look into and find the solutions from the authentic sources of Islam. Understanding the need enables us to understand the steps we need to take in order to achieve the goal. And Allaah () is the source of all strength.