

- Memory

BEAT BRAIN FOG

Finding it difficult to concentrate, or do you sometimes feel forgetful? Clare O'Reilly asks the experts how to sharpen your thinking

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DO you ever walk into a room, only to forget why you went there in the first place? Or go to introduce someone to a friend and their name is a total blank?



You may have brain fog. And you are by no means alone.

Long Covid didn't exist before 2020, yet the condition – characterised by ongoing symptoms of Covid-19 – is estimated to affect two million in the UK. And brain fog is an issue for 65 per cent of them.

Of course, brain fog is by no means a new phenomenon. Indeed, it can occur at various stages in life, including during pregnancy and menopause, and it impacts on 60 per cent of women from perimenopause onwards.

It can be a sign of a more serious condition too, so if you are concerned about changes, always consult your GP.

Experts say our love affair with technology is a contributing factor too.

“We are virtually outsourcing more of our memory tasks, such as directions or phone numbers,” said memory specialist Danny Greeves (dannygreevescoaching.com).

“The downside of this is that the skill of remembering becomes weaker. Dubbed digital dementia, it describes how our increased – and sometimes excessive – use of technology weakens our ability to retain information.”

If this is you, help is at hand. In fact, it's easier to boost your brain than you may think.

BE SELECTIVE

Be choosy about what you try to remember, said memory expert Juliet Landau Pope (jlpcoach.com). Do you really need to keep so much in your head? Let some things go and it'll free up space for the more important stuff. “For example, use a planner or diary to write down appointments rather than trying to remember them,” she said.

REPEAT NAMES

To remember the name of someone you meet, repeat it out loud when you're introduced, advised Juliet. Or use their name when you address them directly. For example, “Nice to meet you, Sarah”. Repeated usage helps names to stick in your mind.

TEACH SOMEONE ELSE

One of the best ways to commit something to memory is to teach it to someone else. “If you need to remember how to follow a sequence of steps, try explaining the method to a friend,” said Juliet.

EAT LIKE YOU'RE ON HOLIDAY

A 2021 study from Germany found the Mediterranean diet, which includes fruit, veg, fish, wholegrains, oils and nuts, provides protection against memory decline and is associated with better memory. “Your brain is always on, and it requires a constant supply of fuel that comes from high-quality foods containing vitamins, minerals, healthy fats and antioxidants,” said nutritionist Milena Kaler (milenaKaler.co.uk).

RAINBOW DIET

A 20-year study from Harvard involving 27,842 participants found a link between diet and memory. Eating orange vegetables like pumpkins and carrots, red vegetables like tomatoes and peppers, and leafy green vegetables like kale meant less memory loss in later life. “Make a list of brain-friendly foods and add one into your meals each week,” said Milena. “Before you know it, you'll have a whole rainbow in your diet.”

DON'T WORRY IF YOU FORGET

“If you do forget something, don't stress out, it'll make it worse,” said memory expert Professor Narinder Kapur (cambridge memory-manual.com).

“Instead of worrying, ask yourself, ‘What can I do next time to help me remember it?’”

MAKE IT A GAME

Trying to jog your memory needn't be a chore. “Turn your shopping list into a game to get your brain in gear,” said Narinder. “Link the items together with a story. A basketful of bananas hurtling towards the ground on a spaceship made from cheese, for example.”

POST ITS

A Post-it Note can help memory, said Narinder. “If you can regularly bring something to mind, you're more likely to remember it,” he added.

“So pop it on the fridge and periodically look at it over the coming hours, days and even weeks.”

“Your brain is always on and requires a constant supply of fuel from food