

Keeping your brain active

Looking after your mental wellbeing is just as important as taking care of your physical health. Keeping your brain active will help to keep your memory in shape and boost your happiness levels. Mental wellbeing is sometimes called 'mental health', 'emotional health' or 'wellbeing'. It means how you think and feel, and how you cope with life's ups and downs. Coping with ups and downs is sometimes called 'emotional resilience'.

Your brain as you get older

People tend to worry more about mental decline in later life than about being physically unwell. However, research shows that although memory lapses are normal, significant mental decline is not inevitable.

Don't worry if you become more forgetful as you get older; this is quite normal. 'Cognitive deficits', like forgetting where you have put things or failing to remember people's names, occur from about the age of 45.

On average, as you get older it will take you longer to remember things and to process information. Scientists have estimated that memory lapses are probably on the rise, as people lead even busier and more pressurised lives.

To help you with this, you can write lists or use images to trigger your memory. You can use apps on your phone and set reminders. Make associations to connect things in your mind, such as using landmarks to help you to find places. You could also run through the alphabet in your head if you are struggling to remember a word or name; often 'hearing' the first letter will jog your memory.

Activities to Keep Your Brain Active

Socialising stimulates your brain and keeps you 'in the know' about what's happening and who's doing what. Drawing on your life experiences and sharing your thoughts with other people will help you to exercise your memory skills.

Newcastle Libraries has a Memory Box Loan Service where they loan memory boxes containing memorabilia, photographs, books and pamphlets to support reminiscence sessions.

Simple everyday tasks can also keep your brain alert. Reading a book and joining a reading group to discuss it, reading a magazine or newspaper all keep the brain active, as well as helping you to relax and sleep. Playing cards and doing crosswords or other puzzles, such as Sudoku, keep your brain active, at the same time as giving you a challenge and being fun.

Learning a new skill is also a good way of keeping your brain active. There are also a number of organisations you can approach to help you, from Colleges, to charities and funding may be available too.

There are also all sorts of games that you can play on the Internet. Many of them are very complicated and require a powerful computer to play them. However, there are some that are simple to play, and good exercise for your brain. See below for some of our suggestions:

- **Crossword Puzzles** – includes crosswords from all over the world
- **It's Your Turn** – chess, draughts, backgammon, and other games
- **Web Sudoku**

There are also a number of apps with puzzles on Google Play and Apple Store.

Music Mirrors is an online digital resource to create your own musical memory toolkit.

Other Useful Information

- Age UK's **Guide to Healthy Living**
- **The Patient Information Centre** offers a range of health related information including;
 - details about self help and support groups
 - copies of leaflets
- You may like to read our article about **Dementia** and Alzheimer's disease if you think your memory is getting worse.
- **NHS 111** You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency.
- **NHS.UK** is a website providing health and medical advice, an online symptom checker and a facility for searching for services near you.

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Useful Organisations

Patient Information Centre – Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust (CNTW)

Website: www.cntw.nhs.uk

Telephone: 0191 246 7288

Address: St Nicholas Hospital, NE3 3XT

Newcastle Libraries

Email: information@newcastle.gov.uk

Website: www.newcastle.gov.uk/leisure-libraries-and-tourism/libraries

Telephone: 0191 277 4100

Address: Newcastle City Library, NE1 8AX

Healthworks

Email: enquiries@hwn.org.uk

Website: <https://www.healthworksnewcastle.org.uk>

Telephone: 0191 272 4244

Address: West End Health Resource Centre, NE4 8BE

NHS 111

Website: www.nhs.uk/111

Telephone: 0191 272 4244

Music Mirrors

Email: heatheredwards.music@gmail.com

Website: <https://www.musicmirrors.co.uk/>

Telephone: 0191 272 4244

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