

Living 50 Plus

Senior News Line

By Matilda Charles

Seniors' senses of smell and taste change with age

Forgetfulness can affect anyone. For example, few, if any, adults can say they have not experienced moments when they could not find their keys. And once the keys are found, people move on without giving much thought to why they did not immediately remember where they left their keys. Isolated incidents where people cannot recall where they placed their car keys or other minor bouts with forgetfulness do not occur by accident.

In fact, the Harvard Medical School notes that they are likely byproducts of age-related changes in thinking skills. When people reach their 50s, chemical and structural changes in the brain may begin to occur, and these changes can affect a person's ability to process memories.

Father Time may be a formidable foe, but people can take steps to give their memories a boost as they get older.

- Embrace recognition instead of trusting recall. Dr. Joel Salinas, a neurologist who specializes in behavioral neurology and neuropsychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital, notes that human beings are better at recognition than recall. That means

people are more likely to remember something they read, such as a note or a list, than something they're simply told.

- Recognize the value of repetition. The Harvard Medical School notes that people might be more inclined to remember what they hear if they repeat it out loud. Names and addresses might be more easily remembered after they're repeated out loud because repetition increases the likelihood that the brain will record the information and be capable of retrieving it later. When studying for exams, many students repeat important points to themselves time and again, and that same approach can be applied by adults who are trying to improve their memories.

- Eat a healthy diet. A study published in 2015 in the journal *Neurology* found that people who eat healthy diets with lots of fruits, vegetables, nuts, and fish and little alcohol and red meat may be less likely to experience declines in their memory and thinking skills. Authored by Andrew Smyth of McMaster University in Ontario and the National University of Ireland in Galway, the study following more than 27,000



people in 40 countries for an average of roughly five years. All participants were 55 and older and had diabetes or a history of heart disease, stroke or peripheral artery disease. Those who ate the healthiest diets were 24 percent less likely to experience cognitive decline than people with the least healthy diets.

- Break things down. Breaking things down into small chunks also can help improve memory. If tasked with remembering something extensive, such as a speech, focus on a single sentence at a time, only moving on to the next sentence when you're confident you have successfully committed the preceding sentence to memory.

Periodic memory lapses are often nothing to worry about. Men and women concerned about maintaining their memories can employ various strategies to do just that.

The various types of arthritis

Arthritis affects hundreds of millions of people across the globe. The Arthritis Foundation® notes that more than 50 million adults in the United States have some type of arthritis, while the European League Against Rheumatism estimates that rheumatic diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis affect more than 120 million people in the European Union. In Canada, the Canadian Community Health Survey found that 16 percent of Canadians age 15 and older were affected by arthritis.

The Arthritis Foundation notes that arthritis is not a single disease. In fact, the word "arthritis" is something of an umbrella term and an informal way of referring to joint pain or joint disease. While these conditions may produce some common symptoms, such as swelling, pain and stiffness, learning to distinguish between some common types of arthritis can help men and women manage their conditions more effectively.

Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis, which is sometimes referred to as "degenerative joint disease" or "OA," is the most common chronic condition of the joints. The symptoms of OA vary depending on the joints that are affected, but pain and stiffness, especially first thing in the morning or after resting, are common. OA can affect the hips, knees, fingers, or feet, and those with OA may feel limited range of motion in their affected areas. Some with OA may hear clicking or cracking sounds when the affected joints

bend, and pain associated with OA may be more intense after activity or toward the end of the day.

Inflammatory arthritis

Inflammatory arthritis occurs when the immune system, which can employ inflammation to fight infection and prevent disease, mistakenly attacks the joints with uncontrolled inflammation. Such a mistake can contribute to joint erosion and even organ damage. Psoriatic arthritis, which the Arthritis Foundation notes affects roughly 30 percent of people with psoriasis, and rheumatoid arthritis are two examples of inflammatory arthritis. Genetics and environmental factors, such as smoking, may trigger instances of inflammatory arthritis.

Infectious arthritis

Bacterium, a virus or a fungus that enters the joint may trigger inflammation and lead to infection arthritis. The Arthritis Foundation notes that the most common bacteria to cause infection arthritis is staphylococcus aureus, or staph. The majority of infectious arthritis cases occur after an infection somewhere else in the body travels through the bloodstream to the joint, though some infections may enter the joint directly

through a puncture wound near the joint or during surgery near the joint. Intense swelling and pain, typically in a single joint, are the most common symptoms of infectious arthritis, which is most likely to affect the knee, though it can affect the hips, ankles and wrists. Some people with infection arthritis may also experience fever and chills.

Metabolic arthritis

The body produces uric acid to break down purines, a substance found in many foods and in human cells. But some people produce more uric acid than they need, which they then struggle to get rid of quickly. As a result, uric acid can build up. The Arthritis Foundation notes that this buildup can lead to the formation of needle-like crystals in the joints that cause sudden spikes of extreme pain.

Arthritis can affect people of any age, race or gender. More information about the various types of arthritis is available at www.arthritis.org.

Summer Activities Close to Home

After a long winter that kept many of us indoors, summer is finally here. Let's take advantage of it and be out and about! All of these ideas involve the cooperation of others.

- Ask at the library about starting a seniors' nostalgia book club in the evening. Read books that you read many years ago and talk about whether your opinions have changed. Find out if the library can show old movies that you haven't seen in years. Consider making these grandparent/grandchild nights. On that same theme, look into craft nights with your grandchildren at the library. Offer to volunteer during the week in exchange, perhaps teaching a small class on one of your skills.
- See if a local coffee shop is willing to let a group meet one morning a week. Ask for volunteer speakers from community businesses.
- Check in with your local

senior center and see what's on the schedule. Group field trips can take you to interesting places, generally by bus, so you don't even have to drive.

If they don't have activities that interest you, make a suggestion, or better yet, volunteer to lead a group to plant flowers or paint some rooms. Organize a barbecue in the parking lot, or an early-morning walk or a picnic at a local park.

- Do you have a community pool? Ask about opening it one morning per week for seniors only. Is there a college pool nearby that might do the same? How about a small group music-lesson series at the college?

- Will a local bookstore offer discounted coffee and snacks in their coffee shop if you meet there once a week?

Sometimes all you need to do is ask, and local businesses and organizations would be happy to have you.

Mastered Cellphone? Step Up to Tablet

What do you buy after you have your cellphone but you're not ready for a full-size computer? Chances are a tablet would be a good next step.

Tablets are like oversized cellphones in their capabilities, only better. With tablets you can check mail, watch videos, make a grocery list, share pictures, check the weather, play games and look around the Internet. Some tablets have drawing capabilities with a special pen.

If you have Wi-Fi in your house, a tablet can connect to it without incurring additional fees to connect to the phone carrier.

Tablets are portable, easier to tote around. If you want to take your tablet out to lunch and read online news while you eat, assuming the restaurant has Wi-Fi, you can do that. If you have a reading app for books you've downloaded, you don't even need the Wi-Fi.

Chances are a tablet won't come with a keyboard, unless you get one fancy enough to attach to a Bluetooth keyboard. Otherwise you'll type right on the screen. You won't need a mouse.

How to pick out a tablet:

- * Try to sample different types in stores, such as Apple iPads and Android, and the various sizes. The 9.7- to 10.1-inch display sizes are a good place to start; the 12-inch models can be heavy.

- * Read the reviews online. You'll care about battery life, weight, price and ease of typing.

Don't forget to add in the cost of any extra goodies you want, like the drawing pen if your tablet can use it, and a new case. (I recommend the Speck Balance Folio, for the sturdiness and the locking cover that protects the glass front. See them at www.speckproducts.com.)

If you enjoy playing music, investigate the cost of Bluetooth speakers.

Secret Shopper Scams

Old scams don't go away, and one of the scams that has come around again is the secret shopper scam. Most people like shopping, and if someone offers payment for it, many of us will try it. After all, it sounds like fun.

Secret shoppers often are hired by legitimate companies to visit one of their stores and make a purchase. Afterward you make a report on things like cleanliness, pricing, employee attitude and more. In response you might get either a free gift or a cash payment.

When it comes to scams, however, you're given the payment first. You'll be sent a check and will be told to cash it, and then go shopping immediately. You'll likely be told to "test" the service at the Western Union desk, or whatever location will transfer money. You'll be instructed to test the system by sending the money you've just received when you cashed the

check. What you won't find out for a long time is that the check you cashed is no good. You used your own money to send a wire transfer, and you'll never get that money back.

Or you might be told to use the cash to buy a handful of gift cards. Again the check will bounce and you'll end up out of pocket for all that money.

Warnings: If you're ever asked to cash a check and send someone else the money, it's a scam. Don't ever pay to sign up as a secret shopper, even to buy a so-called directory. And don't fall for the certification fraud -- you don't need a certificate to do secret shopping.

If you're interested in having a legitimate part-time job as a secret shopper, go online to mysteryshop.org to search their database of legitimate companies. Read more at the www.consumer.ftc.gov website about secret shopping scams.

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