

Memory loss: just stress or is it more serious?

More and more people seek help because they feel that their memory has worsened and they cannot remember names of other people, things that have been said and events that have happened. Some complain that they cannot remember numbers, cannot calculate sums in their heads any more or feel that they are emotionally disconnected, as they cannot remember events that others can describe in detail.



We are entering a time where many people feel more stress and experience that their memory is becoming impaired. Our memory can get worse if we have high stress levels, cannot sleep well and feel overwhelmed all the time. Traumatic events can also cause memory loss. When we have high levels of stress or trauma, our cortisol (our stress hormone) levels change and adrenalin levels rise to give us more energy. This can cause foginess in the brain and we can react irrationally. After a period of prolonged stress our adrenalin levels can drop down and we feel burned out on a physical and mental level, hence feeling mentally tired and not being able to think as fast as before.

When the brain has de-stressed and we feel more in control, our memory is often rejuvenated and we experience normal recall.

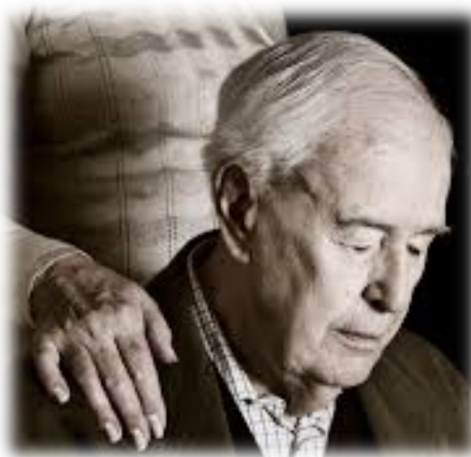
However, we have more and more clients in our office who feel that their memory levels have dropped significantly, their stress levels are not decreasing and would like to train their brain up to function optimally again.

One has to differentiate between stress-related memory loss and a more serious reason why memory is declining.

Here is a summary of some well-known illnesses that cause memory problems.

Alzheimer's

There are a number of symptoms related to Alzheimer's. The most common ones are that the person can:



- Be confused about time and space
- Have problems speaking or writing
- Lose things and forgetting what they have done with the items
- Have difficulty judging things accurately any more
- Show mood and personality changes, such as feeling depressed, angry, irritated and anxious.

Those symptoms start in a mild form initially and get more severe with time. Unlike several other chronic illnesses, the incidence of Alzheimer's is on the rise; recent research suggest that it has become the third leading cause of death, after cardiovascular disease and cancer.

Vascular Dementia

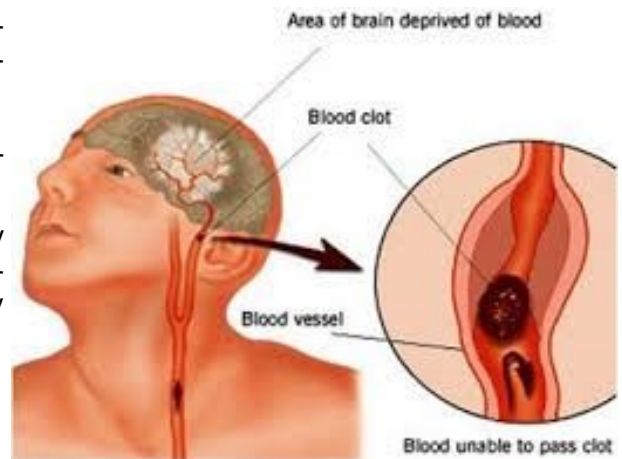
People show signs of memory loss after having had a major stroke, or one or more "silent" strokes, which can happen without them realizing it.

The symptoms depend on the part of the brain that's affected by the stroke.

In comparison to Alzheimer's, which starts with memory problems, vascular dementia often starts with poor judgment, not being able to plan or organize things well any more, and making poor decisions.

The symptoms of Vascular Dementia can include:

- Memory problems
- Trouble speaking and/or understanding speech
- Problems recognizing sights and sounds that used to be familiar
- Feeling confused, restless or agitated
- Changes in behavior and mood
- Problems walking and having frequent falls



It is important to understand why our memory declines and why it is necessary for your doctor to make a proper diagnosis.

The good news is that science has advanced quite a lot and there are many different treatment and training options that can be used to improve your brain functioning and memory again.

A study conducted by Dr. Dale Bredesen of the UCLA Mary S. Easton Center for Alzheimer's disease Research and the Buck Institute for Research on Aging shows that: "A broader-based therapeutic approach, rather than a single drug that aims at a single target, may be feasible and potentially more effective for the treatment of cognitive decline due to Alzheimer's.

Cognitive decline is a major concern of the aging population and people who have high levels of stress in their lives. Alzheimer's affects approximately 30 million people globally. It is estimated that by 2050, without effective prevention and treatment, 160 million people globally would have the disease."

There are a number of different treatment options in helping you increase your memory. Your doctor will recommend medication that can help the brain to stabilize and prevent a decline in functioning if you suffer from a specific memory related illness. In addition, it is important to learn skills to increase your brain's functioning, such as memory techniques and emotional intelligence skills that change negative behaviors and thought patterns. Counseling is necessary for people who have slipped into depression or anxiety due to their decline in functioning and negative changes in their lives. Your brain can be helped by taking supplements such as Omega 3, Gingko Bilbao, Vitamin C and Zink to increase your brain functioning. Make sure that you sleep enough as this can improve your memory greatly. In addition, guided meditation is another way to distress your brain and gain back your memory.

Finally, it is important to train your brain to function optimally again which can be achieved with neurofeedback/brain training where the areas in the brain that are not functioning optimally, are trained up again. Just like training your body at gym, you can train your brain - improving areas in the brain that are not working optimally. Luckily our brain has plasticity, which means it acts like a muscle that can be trained and changed to overcome negative functioning patterns.

So don't just think that your memory is bad due to age. We can train our brains and increase our memory, feel better and gain our confidence back when needing to recall facts, names, numbers or events. You are never too old to train your brain!

For more information on this topic and how you can better your memory, please contact me on: andrea@eq-advantedge.co.za

