Boost Your Memory

While memory does change with age and older people have an increased risk of certain illnesses that can cause dementia (literally, “undoing of the mind”), healthy individuals can improve their memory fitness throughout their lifespans. Attention is one of the most sensitive aspects of cognitive functioning, and so called ‘memory lapses’ can be the result of being easily distracted from acquiring the information in the first place. Strategies for increasing attention include:

• Increase awareness of what is going on around you. “I need to notice where I am putting my book so I’ll be able to find it later.”

• Make a conscious effort to be present in the moment and to attend to what you are doing.

• Try to give meaning and organization to what you are focusing on. For instance: develop visual images or create a story line related to what you want to remember.

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Bringing Menopause Into the Mainstream

Rhea Hirshman, editor

Writing a book about menopause was a “real learning experience” for Ivy Alexander, PhD, C-ANP, APRN. Alexander, who is Associate Professor and Interim Director, Adult, Family, Gerontological and Women’s Health Primary Care Specialty at Yale School of Nursing, and a primary care clinician in Internal Medicine at YUHS, says that she has always been interested in women’s health.

She adds, “I developed an interest in menopause and midlife health issues because of my patients. As the women I care for age, they are experiencing menopausal symptoms and developing problems more commonly seen in midlife—like osteoporosis, heart disease and diabetes.”

With co-author Karla Knight, RN, MSN, a nurse and health care writer, Alexander wrote One Hundred Questions and Answers About Menopause, published by Jones & Bartlett. Prior to writing the book, Alexander had developed a study with the backing of the National Institute for Nursing Research, focusing on the experiences with midlife and menopause of African-American women in New Haven and Washington, DC. The study was done in partnership with other clinicians from Yale and from Howard University.

“The intention,” Alexander says “was to learn from women what they do to manage their symptoms, then to help them develop self-management interventions and ways of decreasing health risks.”

She continues, “I was struck by how often women—regardless of income level or education—talked about symptoms of menopause without knowing that menopause was what was causing the symptoms,” Alexander says.

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Menopause
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“All the women in our groups had access to health care through some kind of insurance. Even so, they most often went for health information to their families, self-help books, friends, and the Internet. A lot of the information they had was incorrect. We realized that menopause is not discussed openly in the mainstream, and remains a mystery to large numbers of women. Even patient-focused ads about menopause are lost on women if the women don’t realize that menopause is the source of the changes they are experiencing.”

Alexander notes that a major reason for this situation is that “menopause symptoms usually begin far before menopause.” She explains, “The bodily changes related to menopause experienced by many women can begin as early as eight to ten years before menopause itself.

A few facts from the book

- The most common symptom of perimenopause is menstrual irregularity.
- Many women report having hot flashes for up to seven years after their last menstrual period.
- While women in ancient societies probably had about 100 menstrual cycles, women today average about 450 menstrual cycles.
- Most women experience natural (non-surgical) menopause between the ages of 48 and 55, with an average age of 51. The age at which one’s mother experienced menopause has some relationship to one’s own menopause, but is not an absolute determinant.
- A majority of women (although not all) who experienced migraines related to their menstrual cycles will no longer have them after menopause—although the headaches may be worse during perimenopause.
- Regular exercise, by helping the body to maintain normal heat regulation and positively effecting mood, can help reduce hot flashes and improve sleep.

This stage is called “perimenopause.” Technically, you reach menopause on the one day when you have not had a period for a year. After that day, we talk about “post-menopause.”

The book notes that “Menopause, although technically a point in time, is a natural life transition. The way you experience menopause is very individual.” Alexander adds, “Women of various ethnic groups also experience menopause differently. In some cultures, becoming an elder is revered, and cultural attitudes can make a significant difference in how women feel about aging. Menopause is a definite physiological transition. We give a lot of information in the book on topics such as the biology of menopause, common symptoms and their causes, and the latest on hormone therapy and alternative treatments. But we also wanted to pay attention to what women themselves were experiencing in the contexts of their own lives and families and communities.”
We have been publishing yale health care for several years and recently I realized that, as a patient at Yale Health Plan myself, I might be able to impart some tips on how best to use our facility.

1. Working with the clinical team
Get to know your clinician and nurse-coordinator. If you are unsure of your clinician’s name, Member Services (203-432-0246) or any clinical receptionist can help you. At YHP we use a team approach, with teams made up of physicians, nurse practitioners, physician associates, registered nurses and medical assistants, all of whom participate in caring for our members. If you need to be seen and your clinician is away, you can see another clinician on the team. Also, become familiar with your clinician’s work practices. For example, ask about how you will be informed about test results, how soon you should make a return visit and so forth. Always come prepared with your list of concerns so that they can be addressed at your appointment. Remember that our clinicians must handle phone calls according to clinical urgency. If you need help with telephone access, speak with the department manager; Member Services can help you to make this contact.

2. Scheduling tips
Plan ahead whenever possible. Try not to wait until the last minute to schedule appointments for general physicals, camp physicals and back-to-school exams. For routine care, our Internal Medicine, Pediatrics and Ob/Gyn Departments suggest that you follow guidelines for frequency of exams, screenings and immunizations. You can ask about these at your appointment or see them on our website: www.yale.edu/uhs. The best times for routine visits are mid-week, as Mondays and Fridays tend to be the busiest days. Arrange for your visit on time. If circumstances prevent this, our clinics will make every effort to help—either by advising you to stay, to reschedule or to see another clinician. If you know that you cannot keep an appointment, please call so that another member may use that time.

3. Times to remember
Be aware of the Yale calendar. At the start of classes, commencements, major holidays and holiday weekends, campus events can affect access. Some examples: The influx of visitors and traffic for graduation may cause delays in traveling to appointments. Holiday weekends are often preceded by increased demand for prescriptions. Many students and faculty leave for the summer and schedule last minute appointments prior to departure.

4. Use YHOL
I use this secure, confidential Internet access for routine questions for my primary clinician, his team and his nurse-coordinator. If you have not established your free YHOL account, go to the website at www.yalehealthonline.yale.edu to visit as a guest and to register. If you have questions about getting a YHOL account, contact Member Services.

5. Our Pharmacy
The YHP Pharmacy is open six days a week (closed Sundays). Pharmacists work closely with clinicians to assure the safest and most effective drug therapies, and are available for advice related to your medications. We have a 24-hour automated prescription refill service, but please note that processing routine refills requires 24 hours and a bit longer for some special order prescriptions and those requiring verification. Call 203-432-0033 and the recording will guide you through the simple refill process. Pharmacy staff can assist you in transitioning new prescriptions from an outside pharmacy to YHP and vice versa. Although your prescription coverage includes medications from other pharmacies, you must pay the full cost “up front” and submit a reimbursement claim. Forms are available at YHP on the first floor opposite the elevators — or downloadable from the Web at www.yale.edu/uhs.

6. Referrals
YHP clinicians can refer you to another YHP department (“internal” referral) or “outside” to our specialists and approved facilities for office visits, treatments or tests. No referral is needed to use our primary care departments. You do need a referral for specialty departments within YHP; your clinician/care team will guide you to a completed referral form with no need for prior authorization.

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Unstick That Tick
Lyme disease is caused by a bacteria transmitted through an infected deer tick. Because transmission is highly unlikely to occur within the first 36 hours of tick attachment, removing ticks before they can transmit disease should be routine for anyone who spends time out of doors in warm weather.

To remove a tick, grasp it firmly with fine tipped tweezers as close to your skin as possible, and with a steady motion pull the tick’s body away from your skin. Do not use petroleum jelly or any other products on the tick because that will make the tick difficult to hold onto. Cleanse the area with antiseptic afterwards. Watch for a red “bull’s eye” rash which may appear 7 to 14 days after the bite. Also, be alert for fever, headaches or flu-like symptoms. If any of these or the rash occurs, consult your clinician.

No Biting
Mosquitoes are attracted to heat, moisture and carbon dioxide—in other words, to breathing humans—and a female mosquito can lay up to 300 eggs at a time. To discourage mosquitoes from snacking on you:

- Wear white when outdoors.
- Avoid being out early in the morning and at dusk, when mosquitoes are most active.

- Choose glasses labeled as blocking 99–100% of UV-A and UV-B rays, or labeled “UV absorption up to 400 nm” (nanometers, a measurement of wavelength). These phrases mean the lenses are coated to block UV light.
- Polarized or mirror coated lenses reflect glare and may be more comfortable for use on snow or water, but they do not offer UV protection.
- Dark lenses are not necessarily better than light colors; the protective chemical coating can be added to any lenses. Dark lenses that are not labeled are not effective.
- Although lens color is not related to UV protection, eye care experts recommend gray, green or brown lenses.

- Children need eye protection too—sunglasses and hats, especially at mid-day. (Adults should wear hats, too!)
- Expensive does not guarantee effective. Many inexpensive models offer good UV protection.
- People who spend a lot of time on snow or water should use wrap-around sunglasses.
- While some contact lenses now feature UV blocking, it is not sufficient protection. If you wear contacts, even with UV blocking, you should still wear sunglasses.
- Tanning booths can damage eyes as well as skin. The FDA requires salons to provide protective goggles. If you use a tanning booth, make sure that you request eye protection.

healthy ideas

- Eliminate standing water, which is a breeding ground for mosquitoes: turn over cans in your recycling bin; remove standing water from outside potted plants; keep birdbaths away from walkways, entryways and windows.
- If you want to use a bug repellent, choose one with at least 30% DEET and apply lightly every couple of hours, rather than in one heavy dose; this method reduces the amount absorbed.

Because some insect bites can result in illness, we must balance the benefits of applying insect repellent against the potential dangers of the chemicals involved. Do not apply near broken skin. Focus on other methods of preventing insect exposure, as listed above.

Stung By a Jellyfish?
- Immediately rinse your skin with seawater. Do not rinse with fresh water. Do not apply ice. Do not rub the skin.
- Make a solution of 95% water and 5% vinegar and soak the injured area until the pain decreases.
- If vinegar is not available, you can use isopropyl alcohol (40% to 70%).
- Contact your clinician if symptoms continue.
Keep Kids Moving
While all children need adequate exercise, children and teens who are active in sports during the school year should pay attention to staying active during the summer. Carol Morrison, MD, chief of Pediatrics at YHP, notes that her department often sees incidents in the autumn of “children experiencing chest pain, shortness of breath and even vomiting because they jumped right back into school sports after having been much less active over the summer.” She suggests encouraging children to be active in something they enjoy—bicycling, swimming, hiking. The activity does not need to be related to school sports. In fact, Morrison notes that “Cross training is preferable, as it reduces feelings of burnout and the risk of injury because different activities use different muscles and joints.” Some other tips:

- To reduce risk of injury, make sure that the correct footwear is worn for each activity.
- Use the correct protective gear (such as helmets and knee and elbow pads) for a given activity.
- Don’t forget the sun block and sunglasses.
- Pay attention to hydration. Avoid sports drinks, as they are too often overloaded with sugar. Instead, use a combination of drinking plain water and eating salty snacks (to stabilize blood sodium levels).
- Getting kids away from “screens” (the television, the computer, video games) and into the outdoors is an important part of keeping them healthy.

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If you are referred “outside” your referral must be approved in advance (“prior authorization”); your clinician will advise you about this. Most outside referrals specify a number of approved visits, so you will need to obtain another referral for additional visits. If you don’t remember how many approved visits you have or if you need additional visits, contact your clinician and/or nurse coordinator. Remember to bring a copy of your referral form to your outside appointment.

8. Is it urgent?
An urgent condition is a sudden, unexpected and acute medical problem or injury that requires immediate attention, or a condition that could lead to serious harm without prompt treatment. Urgent conditions should be treated in an emergency setting or an “urgent care” site. If you are unsure about where to go for care, call your clinician during the business day or YHP Urgent Care any time of day or night. You can get clinical advice by calling Urgent Care (203-432-0123 or 877-YHP-Care) if you are away from the area and have an urgent problem.

9. Visit our web site
Become familiar with our website at www.yale.edu/uh where you will find information about our clinical staff and about using YHP, as well as downloadable documents such as claim forms and release of medical record forms. You will also find health care tips, links to other sites, clinical test prep instructions and a listing of YHP resources. Events are posted, as well as current and past issues of yale health care.

10. How can we help?
The Member Services Department can answer questions about eligibility, enrollment, benefits and services. If you need assistance or want to offer feedback, we want to hear from you. In addition to Member Services, the managers and chiefs of our clinical departments and my staff are always eager to assist you, so please give us a call if questions or problems arise.

Boost your memory continued from page 1

- Simple repetition. Advertisers know this. That’s why you’ll hear or see the same ad over and over. You can use the technique of repetition to your own advantage to help you remember something.
- Get enough sleep. Fatigue is one of the most common conditions which interferes with attention and increases distractibility. A rested mind is an alert mind.
- Get enough aerobic exercise. In addition to increasing overall levels of health and fitness, regular exercise helps increase blood flow to the brain and increases efficiency of delivery of oxygen and nutrients.
- Stay mentally active. Activities such as solving puzzles, attending classes, learning new skills and/or information will enhance overall memory fitness.
- Eat a well balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids. In addition to being an important factor in general health, good nutrition can also boost mental efficiency.

Be aware of emotional factors such as stress, depression and anxiety. In addition to reducing overall levels of health, depression and anxiety can directly interfere with memory, as can some medications.
A Reminder About Durable Medical Equipment

The Yale Health Plan benefit for durable medical equipment (such as crutches, braces, canes, splints) involves a $100 deductible and a 20% co-payment, with a maximum benefit of $5,000 per member per year. When you obtain durable medical equipment, you will be billed for the deductible and/or co-payment up front and Yale Health Plan picks up the rest of the cost as part of your benefit coverage.

Yale University Health Services Award

The annual Student Health Education Award presented by YUHS was awarded this year to Andrea Maikovich (Morse College) ’05. This prize is awarded to a graduating Yale College senior who has demonstrated commitment and achievement in the field of health education and health promotion. The award recognizes qualities of good character and volunteerism in promoting an awareness of healthy lifestyles among undergraduates at Yale.

Maikovich was sited for making “a significant impact as an ECHO (Eating Concerns Hotline and Outreach) counselor and educator. As an ECHO counselor, she was instrumental in reaching a number of students and was often successful in referring them for ongoing care. She worked diligently to prepare new or improved educational materials and programs. As a residential liaison, Maikovich was a solid resource for her peers and was skilled and knowledgeable in responding to their questions and addressing their needs.” The committee decided unanimously to award Maikovich this honor for work that positively affected the lives of her fellow students. She will continue her education in clinical psychology at the University of Pennsylvania.

Safe Cooking

As you enjoy outdoor cooking, take some common-sense precautions.

- Keep the lid on your outdoor grill to keep temperature consistent.
- Many barbecue sauces contain sugars which increase browning but also burn easily. Apply barbecue sauce only during the last few minutes of cooking to reduce burning and flare-ups.
- Never defrost meat, poultry or fish on the counter. Defrost in the refrigerator overnight. Cook hamburgers, veggie burgers and hot dogs while they are still frozen. Hot dogs need to be well-cooked; don’t think of them as precooked deli meat. Cases of deadly bacterial infections have been linked to undercooked hot dogs.
- To avoid bacterial contamination, use two platters, one for uncooked meat and one for cooked meat. Have separate cutting boards for meat and for vegetables. Sanitize your food preparation area by washing surfaces with hot water and a bleach-based soap, paying special attention to areas that are in contact with meat products.
- Wash hands thoroughly before and after handling food, especially when handling raw meat, fish and poultry. Regular soap and water is fine; antibacterial soaps are not necessary for hand washing.
- Do not reuse barbecue sauce that is brushed on during grilling if it is in an open bowl. Each time you return the spoon or brush to the bowl you are contaminating the contents.
- When making kabobs, leave space between the items to promote even cooking. Place items which need more cooking over the hotter coals. And cook tomatoes on a separate skewer. They cook the fastest and tend to fall off before other items are done.
The Ins and Outs of Filling Prescriptions

Even in an era when most medications are not actually compounded in a pharmacy (although some still are), “filling a prescription” involves much more than simply counting out pills. The sequence of events between the moment the prescription slip is picked up by a member of the Pharmacy staff and when you walk out the door, medicine in hand, includes not only packaging your prescription, but systematically recording and analyzing your order.

Who Are You?
As you drop off your prescription order at the Pharmacy counter, you may be asked several questions. If a prescription is electronically submitted or faxed, the clinician includes all the appropriate identifying information along with the prescription. If there is any need for clarification a member of the Pharmacy staff will contact the clinician.

How do you spell your name? Spelling your name correctly is an essential part of keeping your file accurate and making sure that you are getting the right prescription—making sure that you are you. Keep in mind that even common names can be spelled in more than one way: John Smythe or Jon Smith; Ann Goldburg or Anne Goldberg; Sara Browne or Sarah Brown. So even if you have an “easy to spell” name, we want to make sure that we get it right.

What is your date of birth? Even if you get all your prescriptions filled at one pharmacy, you may find yourself being asked this question every time. You may be thinking, “I haven’t changed my birthday since the last time I was here!” True. But your date of birth is a second form of identification, particularly if your name is the same as or similar to that of another member.

What Happens Next?
Several procedures go into making sure that your prescription medication is right for you:

Checking the written prescription order. If there are no questions about the prescription order, the pharmacist will go to the next steps. If clarification is needed the pharmacist will contact the clinician.

Entering your information into the computer. The pharmacist then begins to enter your prescription information into the computer system. This system ensures that your complete medication history is at the fingertips of both the pharmacist and your clinician—especially important in an emergency, when a clinician may need to know exactly what medications you are or have been taking. Try to go to the same pharmacy for all your prescriptions and always inform the pharmacist of any drug products—prescription and nonprescription—that you have obtained from other sources. At YHP, you can use our “nonprescription medication form” for this purpose.

Checking your prescription history. After the information has been scanned into the computer system via barcode technology, the pharmacist checks your prescription history, looking especially for therapeutic duplication—the simultaneous use of two or more medications that serve the same purpose.

Guarding against drug interactions. Pharmacists also look for potential adverse interactions. Interactions occur not only between prescription drugs, but also between prescription drugs and over-the-counter medications, and even some foods and beverages. An interaction may also occur when a medication prescribed for one problem has an unintended effect on another problem.

Checking dosage and duration. Pharmacists verify the dosage and duration of use, comparing against standard recommendations. When your clinician varies from the standard or prescribes a drug that is not commonly used to treat your condition, the pharmacist may need more information to be sure the prescribed drug therapy is best for you.

Checking against allergies. Pharmacists also check for medication allergies by reviewing your medication records every time you have your prescriptions filled.

Making recommendations. Pharmacists are trained not only to recognize the potential for drug interactions and allergies, but also to recommend to the clinician the best alternatives when necessary.

Checking and rechecking. Once the “pills in the bottle” or the package is pulled from the shelf—a series of highly-controlled steps—the computer-generated label is affixed to the container and the technician scans a personal barcode which identifies that technician as the filler of that prescription. After the prescription is filled, the pharmacist reads the prescription label. The written directions were checked as the information was entered into the computer record system and are now checked against the written order. The contents of the package are checked to ensure that what was prescribed is what was placed in your box or tube or bottle. The pharmacist does a final check via his/her own personal barcode that identifies that pharmacist as the checker of that prescription. Labels are supplied when necessary to alert you to side effects, possible interactions and other information.

One last check—and counseling. At pickup the cashier again checks the identity with a birth date that is printed along with the patient’s name and address on the receipt. The person picking up the medication signs an electronic record at the register. As you receive your medication, you have the opportunity to talk to the pharmacist. And, of course, if you have questions after you leave, call us at 203-432-0033.
Wellness Programs at YUHS

Blood Pressure Monitoring

The Office of Health Promotion and Education conducts monthly blood pressure screenings at various campus locations (consult the YHP website for dates and places) for YHP members who are not currently being treated for a blood pressure problem. Members who have been diagnosed and are under treatment for hypertension are monitored in the Internal Medicine Department (203-432-0038) by appointment (Monday through Friday, 8:30 am to 4:00 pm).

Cancer support group

Life Options is a support group for adult YHP members diagnosed with cancer, regardless of type of cancer or stage of disease. The group meets weekly with a facilitator. There are three 15-week programs each year, and members can enroll in consecutive series of meetings. The group is partially funded by the Edith S. Hallo Fund and by a small weekly fee charged to each participant. To enroll or for more information, contact the facilitator, Naomi Panza, msw, at 203-432-0290.

I Want To Be A Lawn

Chemicals used to create a “perfect” lawn pose significant health risks to adults, children and pets. These toxic substances eventually move into the groundwater and that water travels into the public water supply. Lawn pesticides are poisons designed to kill living organisms and they are linked to higher rates of cancer, birth defects, nerve damage and learning disabilities in mammals. According to the (federal) EPA (Environmental Protection Administration), 95% of the pesticides used on residential lawns are possible or probable carcinogens. If you want to encourage the traditional turf lawn look while eliminating the poisons, do the following:

• Choose grasses appropriate for this environment.
• Mow high and mow often, with a well-sharpened mower.
• Water deeply but infrequently. This encourages deeper root growth, resulting in a more stable and disease-resistant lawn instead of one whose roots remain near the surface.
• Don’t worry about drought. Well-established lawns will not die under drought conditions. They will just turn brown and then green up again when the rain falls.