

NORMAL COGNITIVE PROCESSES AS WE AGE

Since there is so much written about dementia and Alzheimer's many people wonder what is normal versus not normal during brain functioning. To alleviate this concern Mary A. Fischer explains six types of normal memory lapses that are **not** a cause for worry. **By understanding these we can relax and not be anxious.**

Absentmindedness: Where did you put your telephone or what was the reason that you went into the living room? We all experience this on occasion, and we can blame a general lack of attention on focus. **But if you can't find your way home after finishing an errand, that could be beyond absentmindedness.**

Blocking: This is the classic but frustrating experience of not being able to recall something from memory that you feel is right there. You know what you are trying to say, but it is hidden. **Blocking usually results from several similar memories creating a disruption.** Think of it as if your memory retrieval button gets jammed.

Scrambling: If you've ever gotten the details wrong but can accurately remember most of an event or other chunks of information, you're scrambling – confusing those little details. A glitch in the hippocampus is likely to blame for this. **It has incorrectly recorded some of the facts.**

Fading away: The brain continually cleans out older memories to make room for new ones. Memories that are not recalled often can begin to fade away because those memories are not being reinforced. **The basic use-it-or-lose-it characteristic of memory is normal at all ages.**

Struggling for retrieval: Aging changes the strengths of the connections between neurons in the brain, and new information can delete other items from short-term memory unless it is repeated again and again. This is why **paying special attention to learning something new immediately and then associating that with something particular or familiar** will help you avoid this glitch.

Muddled multitasking: The number of things you can do effectively at one time diminishes. Studies show **that the older we get, the more effort it takes the brain to maintain focus and takes longer to get back to an original task after an interruption.**

Mary A. Fischer, "6 Types of Normal Memory Lapses and Why You Needn't Worry About Them," AARP, stayingsharp.aarp.org/about/brain-health/normal-memory/

Fischer's material is found in S. Gupta's book Keep Sharp, Build a Better Brain at Any Age, pages 71-73.

Submitted by: Dr. Dale Johnson