

# BRUNCH

Wellness

PHOTO: AJAY AGGARWAL

## Total Recall

Very often, we find ourselves forgetting phone numbers, car keys or people's names. Here's how to stop

by Parul Khanna

**D**O YOU find yourself losing track of your car and house keys, handbags, documents and other sundry items? Or forgetting the name of a person seconds after being introduced? Relax, these aren't early warning signs of Alzheimer's, rather it's a more common malaise - sheer forgetfulness. Says Dr Ajay Pal Singh, consultant psychiatrist, Max Healthcare, Delhi, "Forgetfulness is inevitable when we are constantly dealing with new information. If you have trouble remembering things, you probably have too much on your mind or are anxious about something. It's just a short-term memory lapse." In fact, Dr Vinitha Jha, psychiatrist, Umkal Healthcare, Delhi, says that forgetfulness about little things varies from individual to individual.

The brain stores information in short-term and long-term memory. The limit on short-term memory tends to be about 7 items for 30 seconds. You use short-term memory when you look at a phone number, walk to the phone and dial it. Long-term memory can store information for a lifetime. "The key is to get past the 30 second limit and store information in your long-term memory. When you consciously try to remember something, you encode the information in your long-term memory," says Dr Singh. Some techniques to help you do this:

**PAY ATTENTION:** Be alert even while performing tasks such as putting down the car keys or lighter. This way you will get into a habit and will remember the next time you need these things. Says Dr Ajay Pal Singh, "Slow down and make an effort to remember. Do one thing at a time, giving each activity your full attention. Limit or reduce noise and interruptions - they interfere with concentration."

**SAY IT:** Get into the habit of saying things aloud or to yourself. Like when you put something away or take some action, say, "I turned off the iron." "I locked the door." When you learn a new name, re-

**IF YOU FORGET THINGS, YOU MAY HAVE TOO MUCH ON YOUR MIND**

**Time for a check-up...**

1. If the memory enhancement strategies don't help
2. If you are 35 years and above, and you forget something as simple as your own anniversary, spouse's/parents' birthdays etc
3. If 65 plus, extreme forgetfulness could be the onset of a disease
4. If below 35, the symptoms could be signs of depression

peat it: "Nice to meet you, Neha."

**WRITE IT DOWN:** Doctors espouse writing and making notes as a great traditional memory tool. Notes and lists help to keep track of things, and the act of writing something down encodes the information. "Keep a note pad/diary handy so you can easily write down the mails you need to send, the exact place you parked your car or an appointment you need to make. Make a list of things you need to do at night. Keep referring to it," says Dr Vinitha Jha.

**CREATE AN IMAGE:** A mental picture of a name makes it easier to recall. Dr Singh cites an example, "Close your eyes and spend a few moments fixing that image in your mind. Say it to yourself a few times. Like if you meet someone called Shradha, picture her in the place where she said she stays."

**USE DESCRIPTIONS:** To remember names, align the person's name with some trait that stands out. Richa Malhotra, a former teacher, says, "If you meet somebody called Meeta, who has an infectious laugh, think 'Happy Meeta.' Or 'Curly Ishani' for a girl with curly hair. Such phrases remain memorable."

**OTHER METHODS:** There are other techniques too that can help you cope with information overload. Give yourself reminders. Set phone alarms. Or, keep a calendar and mark days and time of work to be finished.

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