

WHERE ARE MY GLASSES?



As we get older, many of us experience meeting new people and a minute later cannot recall their names. We forget important things – such as doctor's appointments or where we left our glasses. These "forgetfulness" or brief memory lapses are normal occurrences in later life and are more a source of annoyance rather than an area for concern. Most of the time, these changes are minor. People who are more intelligent at a young age seem to be more able to exercise their mental function through education, occupation, or stimulating activities retain their mental function with aging better than those who are not. "Super-agers," or adults over 80 whose memory is at least as good as normal middle-aged adults may have been endowed with more mental capacity when they were young, or they may be more resistant to age-induced mental decline. They may have just had good genes, they may have been more mentally active over their lifetime, or they may have had healthier diets, more exercise, and less stress than those in the average group.

Various changes in the brain can affect mental function, even in healthy older people. For example, some older adults find that they don't do as well as younger people on complex memory or learning tests. While memory declines for many people over time, aging principally affects episodic memory, or memory for specific events or experiences that occurred in the past. More problematic for older adults is remembering the context or source information: where or when something was heard or read, or even whether something really happened or was just imagined. The retrieval of a person's name or a specific word are common deficits seen with normal aging. High levels of emotion or stress generally have negative effects on memory.