How Common Is ADHD Memory Loss?

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Coping With ADHD Memory Loss

Sometimes the influence of a mental health condition goes beyond the expected symptoms and criteria for diagnosis. When this is the case, the impact of the illness seems to infiltrate and corrupt multiple aspects of your mental health, physical health, everyday functioning, and overall wellbeing. The condition makes life more complicated in ways too numerous to count.

Take attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) as an example. It's known to affect your attention, concentration, and activity levels. Inattention symptoms include:

- Problems staying organized
- Avoiding tasks that require mental effort
- Losing important items frequently
- Easily distracted
- Not listening when spoken to
- Not following through on instructions
- Forgetting events or information regularly

By investigating the symptoms, it is easy to see just how pervasive ADHD can be in someone's life. Someone who has problems staying organized will likely suffer at school, work, or home as necessary assignments or chores will be done incorrectly or not at all.

Someone who avoids tasks that require mental effort may appear to be lazy or unmotivated when the source is actually ADHD. If you inspect the final three items on the list, it will be easy to see the likely result.

Someone who has trouble listening to others, problems with follow-through, and is forgetful will have a poor memory.

Working Memory and Short-Term Memory

Children and adults with ADHD often have deficits in two types of memory. Working memory is a very short-term store of information that can be changed and modified to accomplish a goal.

Doing math in your head is a good example of working memory; trying to figure 110 minus 66 may take a bit of time to complete without paper, but you can image the numbers, manipulate them, and complete the subtraction to arrive at 44.

That is the power of working memory — it helps with everything from childhood games, to social interactions, to completing an important presentation for work. Any time information needs to be processed in your mind, it is working memory task.

Working memory is confused for short-term memory but stands in contrast for several reasons. Short-term memory's primary responsibility is to remember information so it can be recalled at a later time.

It is used when someone gives you an order to complete or when you have to remember a phone number.

Short-term memory is a concern for people with ADHD but for another reason: a lack of attention or concentration to the task at hand will not allow the information to be accepted into short-term memory.

If the information is not absorbed, there will be no way to recall it at a later time. For example, if someone is giving you a list of items to pick up from the store and you are distracted by the bird outside the window or you begin thinking of a TV show from last night, you may only remember a few pieces of the complete list.

Next page: how to boost your memory to combat ADHD memory loss.

Boosting Memory and Recall

As a child or adult, problems with working or short-term memory can create many unwanted consequences, like:

- Low grades
- Poor performance at work
- Financial problems related to poor budgeting and forgetting to pay bills
- High conflict in social, work, and romantic relationships

With so much at risk, solutions must be the focus for the future to improve short-term and working memory. Since working memory and short-term memory vary, they might require different treatment options.

Notably, medications designed to treat ADHD may be helpful with short-term memory problems but not with working memory deficits. If you are interested in improving your short-term memory or that of a loved one, consider the following options:

Be Realistic

Having expectations grounded in reality will allow you to avoid disappointment and regret. Your memory will not be as strong as people without ADHD, and that's okay.

Thinking you can remember information without taking extra steps will only result in you feeling farther from your goals. Accepting your limitations will lead to better results.

Let People Know

Now that you have grown your acceptance of your memory issues, you can spread the information to others. It is not meant to be an excuse or a method to gain sympathy from others — it is a way to produce better results.

If you tell your supports up front that you have issues with memory, they can employ special measures to boost your success.

Calm the Inside

The mind of someone with ADHD can be a swirl of many ideas, thoughts, and feelings, as well as ADHD hyperfocus. Because of this, taking measures to slow down and focus your internal processes can help your progress.

Consider meditation, exercise, and relaxation techniques, as well as rethinking your diet and sleep habits to aid your memory.

Calm the Outside

Anyone will struggle with memory if their environment is a constant barrage of stimuli. Limit extraneous sights and sounds to increase focus, and try doing only one task at a time, since doing too much as once will limit your resources.

Since working memory operates in different ways, it requires unique interventions, like:

- Adding regular routines to your day will start to reprogram your behaviors so you're less reliant on memory. Routines build habits, which require less working memory to be completed.
- Reminders decrease your dependency on working memory by placing the information in a tangible location. If someone gives you several steps to complete, don't rely on your memory — write it down, put a reminder in your phone, or tie a ribbon around your finger.