



# Master of Memory

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## Relevance

Studies show that 80% of older adults complain about memory problems, but only 15% report these problems to their health professional. People of all ages forget, but older people tend to worry more about forgetting and memory loss.

Many things may diminish memory. Increased anxiety about memory loss may interfere with the hippocampus, which puts together new memories and processes them for storage. Regardless of age, memory losses are increased by factors such as inattention, anxiety, or depression. Living alone, stress, illness, adapting to loss, and negative stereotypes, may affect memory.

Biological factors, such as hearing and vision loss, and psychological factors may also affect memory. Additionally, medical conditions — such as hypertension or high cholesterol — may play a role in memory function. Physical activity combined with proper nutrition may be able to impact high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol. Higher levels of physical activity may increase blood flow to the brain, which is integral to brain function.



While there may be changes in memory as people grow older, most people can improve their memory with training and practice. Improving memory, however, requires a belief that change is possible. Studies have shown that older adults were less likely than younger adults to attribute memory function to controllable factors such as using effective strategies. Those elders who did make attributions to these factors demonstrated better performance than their peers who did not see memory as being under their control. Other research demonstrates that older adult memory performance can be improved through external and internal strategy training.

## Response

The goal of the *Master of Memory* program is to improve participants' memory function. *Master of Memory* encourages participants to recognize that they can impact their memory function, evaluate their own memory function, identify factors that may enhance or detract from their memory function, and find ways that may help address some of those factors. The six-lesson series includes presentations on memory and learning, memory strategies, nutrition, medications, medical conditions, and exercise for the body and mind.

More than 120 people, including county Extension agents – Family and Consumer Sciences and volunteers, have received training to deliver the *Master of Memory* program series.

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## Results

In 2016, an evaluation study was conducted with 93 participants who completed the *Master of Memory* series. The age of participants ranged from 35 to 85 years old (mean = 62); 78% of respondents were female. Significant differences from pre to post were noted in three primary outcome areas related to memory function: confidence in ability to improve memory, understanding controllable risk factors associated with memory loss, and understanding actionable steps that can be taken to improve memory.

As a result of attending the educational series, participants demonstrated higher confidence levels in their ability to take steps to improve their memory functioning. Similarly, respondents indicated a reduction in negative attitudes related to memory and aging. Data also indicated that respondents had a significant increase in their understanding of risk factors that may be controlled to help memory function, including diabetes, depression, hearing loss, and vision loss. Lastly, respondents indicated an improved understanding of proactive steps they could take to improve their memory.

Retrospective-post evaluation was used to garner understanding of essential concepts presented in each lesson. Changes in knowledge can be seen in the following table:



Item	Pre	Post	Change
Memory loss may be a “normal” part of growing older.	97%	47%	52%
There may be things I can do to slow/stop my memory loss.	14%	100%	86%
My memory is getting worse as I grow older.	100%	43%	57%
I can name at least two strategies to help me remember.	10%	99%	890%

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