

How to Make Learning Stick

Learn about common working memory challenges for ADHD children. Plus tips, tools, and tricks for training the brain to remember more, and forget less.

What Is Working Memory?

Working memory is the most immediate, shortest-term memory. It stores what you're paying attention to in the moment, and helps you hold onto information that you're processing, and will act on soon – like remembering a phone number while you dial it. It also lets you hold a task in mind while you work on it – like thinking about cleaning your room while you actually do it.

Make it Stronger to Remember Longer

You can improve working memory in two ways: increasing filtering/decreasing impulsivity, and teaching the brain to remember more with practice and learning tricks. The main treatments are ADHD meds and Cogmed working memory training. But additional environmental factors and parental interventions can help kids recall more and forget less.

Inside the ADHD Brain

Each day, you encounter stimuli in the world and inside your own head – like getting a text, or seeing something in a store. You decide to respond to some, and not others by filtering them in the prefrontal cortex. Then you pause to make choices about how you'll react. People with ADHD tend to react more quickly, often because they don't have the ability to stop and filter when a stimulus comes in. This is linked to impulsivity — jumping to that distracting idea rather than focusing on the more important stuff.

Finding Focus

Often, the problem isn't memory, it's attention – you can't remember something if you don't notice it first. ADHD meds can help by flooding your brain with dopamine, the neurotransmitter responsible for filtering ideas and finding focus. Working memory often improves while an ADHD medication is working, but declines when the pill wears off.

Learning to Learn

Before something is learned, it has to pass through working memory. People with ADHD are less efficient learners because they're distracted, and might need to re-read a worksheet three times before the information travels through their working memory to the long-term. Cogmed works by training the brain to focus, and remember more with progressively difficult memory exercises and repeated practice.

How Parents Can Help

Working memory improves with age until it hits a peak in your late 20s. Then you lose 5% per decade. Most people don't really notice the decline until their late 50s because adults develop tricks to help trigger memories. School-aged kids, however, are still developing their working memories and can benefit from learning the ways you remember things as an adult, like making a grocery list or marking events on the calendar.

Teach Kids How to Remember

Use memory tricks like acronyms -- like HOMES to remember the Great Lakes -- or repeating important information. Give your kid a little speech to memorize three main points, like you would repeat a phone number to remember it. Engage their senses. Use written flash cards. If it's a speech, say it out loud, then quiz each other on the main points.

Reminders to Remember

Help kids reduce competing stimuli (distractions), and increase the strength of important stimuli so they can focus on them more. It's easy to do this with external memory aids like bright post-its, and to-do lists or assignment books. Verbal conversations or instructions can be tougher to remember, so train kids to pull out a piece of paper or their phone right away to capture important information on the spot.

Manage Their Environment

Our memory tends to fail us when we're overtired, overwhelmed, or really hungry. Minimizing these challenges to working memory can help kids live up to their capabilities. Make sure kids eat healthy, take a multivitamin, and an essential fatty acid supplement. Getting enough sleep, eating a good diet, and exercising regularly won't necessarily improve memory, but it will help kids be the best they can be.

Forgetful to Focused

There's no miracle supplement to make working memory problems go away. Instead, focus on living a good, healthy lifestyle and practicing smart learning strategies. Occasionally doing random memory exercises won't improve kids' memory long term. But you can improve their encoding skills by committing to over-learning or over-practicing. You can also improve retrieval through external cues that help force information into the long-term memory, and take your child from forgetful to focused.

Further Information

For additional information about ADHD and working memory, visit the following links:

- [Understanding ADHD Emotions and Working Memory](#)
- [Improve Working Memory for ADHD Children](#)
- [What you Need to Know About Cogmed Working Memory Training](#)
- [Memory Tips for ADHD Students](#)
- [4 Brain Training Therapies](#)
- [Treat ADHD Symptoms with Brain Training](#)

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