

DEMENTIA: SHOULD YOU BE WORRIED? TAKE THIS MEMORY TEST TO FIND OUT

NORMAL MEMORY PROBLEMS

- Forgetting what you went upstairs for.
- Taking several minutes to recall where the car is parked.
- Forgetting to call a friend back while working from home with misbehaving children.
- Putting things down and being unable to find them soon after.
- Forgetting something trivial a friend mentioned the day before.
- Forgetting the name of someone you've just met.
- Briefly forgetting the word for something — the 'thingamabob' moment.

Why this might be happening

'Our immediate short-term memory is very easily distractible,' says Dr Oliver Cockerell, a consultant neurologist at The London Clinic. 'Your brain knows you're unlikely to need to remember a menial task such as going upstairs to get a book in a few hours, so it erases the memory to make room for more important stuff. That's why we all sometimes can't remember why we walked into a room.' So why do we forget trivial information? Dr Marie Janson, director of development at Alzheimer's Research UK, explains: 'The brain has to decide whether new information is worth remembering — if so, it'll put it in your long-term memory; if not, it's deleted.' Stress, grief and lack of sleep can also affect memory, as can trying to do too many things at once.

SLIGHTLY WORRYING

- Multi-tasking becomes difficult eg preparing a Sunday roast suddenly seems overwhelming.
- Problems negotiating familiar places, such as you regularly can't find your vehicle in the car park.
- Forgetting the names of close relatives and friends.
- Problems recognising faces, colours, shapes and words.

- Repeating the same question asked half an hour previously.
- Changing personality, such as a social butterfly who turns reclusive.
- Finding that you've left objects in the wrong place, such as keys left in the lock, and not remembering leaving them there.

Why this might be happening

Many of these symptoms could actually be a sign of depression, stress or a lack of concentration. However, they may be early warning signs of dementia or Alzheimer's. 'The patients I see with dementia are those brought in by their worried families who can see something is wrong', said neurologist Dr Cockerell. 'Huge numbers come in because they can't remember people's names. The bottom line is, if you're aware of your memory problems, you're unlikely to have dementia.'

SEE YOUR GP

- Asking for a cup of tea, not realising you've just had one.
- Forgetting a grandchild's name, but childhood memories are vivid.
- No idea how to perform everyday tasks, such as washing.
- Finding family structure confusing, such as not being clear which grandchild belongs to whom. Impaired judgment, e.g. wearing a thick overcoat in summer.
- Being unable to tell what the purpose of an everyday object is.
- Not recognising friends and family.
- Leaving belongings in strange places, e.g. a kettle under the bed or a wallet in the fridge.
- Feeling disorientated about time and place — frequently visited places are unfamiliar.

Why this might be happening

Alzheimer's affects the hippocampus, the part of the brain responsible for short-term memory. Long-term memory is usually unaffected.