Dealing With Depression and Memory Loss

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The Link Between Depression and Memory Loss

It seems your memory is not performing like it once did. If someone tells you something, it's gone. If you read a new piece of information, it's gone. Your ability to learn new things and recall it at a later time is suffering. This is common, as depression and memory loss are linked.

Your memory problems have been stretching beyond learning and recalling information. Memory loss and depression brain fog are beginning to impact your entire life. You struggle to remember conversations you've had, places you have gone, and whether or not you have eaten lunch. This is going past typical and expected memory slips; it is getting scary.

Interestingly, there is some evidence to suggest that your memory issues might be linked to depression. Yes, the disorder that affects your mood, energy, sleep, appetite, self-esteem, and motivation may influence your memory as well.

So, what contributes to depression's impact, and what can be done about it? Let's take a closer look at depression and memory loss.

Check for Other Sources

Before you explore the connection between depression and memory loss, it will be important to exhaust other possible sources. Mental health conditions like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and traumatic events can decrease your memory, as can a list of physical health conditions like:

- Alzheimer's disease and other dementias
- Head injuries
- Stroke
- Seizures
- Parkinson's disease

To find out more about these issues, schedule an evaluation with an appropriate treatment provider. A mental health practitioner can assess your memory issues related to your current psychology, while your primary care physician might be a reasonable starting point to gauge your physical health.

Executive Functioning

Executive functioning is associated with ADHD, but there is an overlap of symptoms and interactions with depression. Strong executive functioning skills allows someone to:

- Assess a situation

- Create a plan
- Get themselves and others organized
- Establish time frames
- Adapt to new problems
- Complete their goal

Someone with these skills will be effective and competent in life. Someone without these skills will struggle to do many of the above tasks. They will have poor consistency, seem forgetful, and appear distracted.

Unsurprisingly, depression is related to problems with executive functioning skills, so the two could be working collaboratively to reduce your memory.

Mood-Dependent Learning and Recall

There is a well-known psychological principle called state-dependent learning that declares people are better able to learn and recall information if they are in the same state during each phase.

This means that if you are studying for a big college exam while you are intoxicated, you would need to be intoxicated while taking the exam for the best score. If your state changes from studying to the exam, your memory would be poor.

It turns out that the same is true for your moods. If you are more depressed during learning, you may not be able to recall the information when your mood is better.

The opposite would be true also. For people with moods that change rapidly, this could present as a major obstacle.

Stress

The simplest explanation might be the cause of your memory problems: stress. Some stress is associated with improved ability and performance in multiple areas like memory, but too much has the opposite effect.

This is a problem for you since people with depression frequently experience higher levels of stress and people with higher stress experience a higher incidence of depression.

Stress will hinder each step of your memory from the reception to the retrieval, which makes it more challenging to absorb, process, and recall information. Over time, chronic stress will change the structures in your brain making memory problems more permanent.

Next page: finding solutions to depression and memory loss.

Finding Solutions for Depression and Memory Loss

If you begin working towards improving your memory by addressing your memory exclusively, you will be frustrated with the little progress you make. Since your memory problems are stemming from depression, this must be the target.

To target depression:

- **Adjust your thinking:** Problematic depression is related to faulty ways of thinking. By thinking in negative ways, your feelings will be more negative and further fuel depression. To adjust your thinking, you must actively produce positive, optimistic thoughts and repeat them with consistency. This process begins to change your perceptions and allows for more hopeful thinking, which produces better feelings.
- **Modify your behaviors:** If you think depressed thoughts, you'll feel depressed. If you engage in

depressed behaviors, you will feel more depressed, so change your actions. By exercising more, spending time with friends, going on new adventures, and other novel activities, you will break out of your rut. Start slow and build consistency.
- **Call in the professionals:** If changing your thoughts and behaviors seems too challenging, look into professional treatment. A therapist can create a treatment plan specifically for your needs. Worried about the cost of seeing a therapist? Many options are available for people with and without insurance coverage.

These depression-focused strategies will produce good results in many situations, but some ongoing memory issues could remain. Perhaps they came from another source or persist due to permanent changes.

With these situations, memory-focused strategies will be more helpful.

Build Listening Skills

A simple way to improve your memory is to ensure the information is received accurately in the first place. This requires attention and focus from you, which can be practiced and improved upon. Try to:

- Avoid distractions like loud noises, other people, and electronic stimulation. Make listening your only objective.
- Make eye contact with the person to fully engage in the conversation.
- Repeat back the message to ensure that you understand it correctly.

Use Assistance

Since you're not going to remember everything everyone tells you, use some assistive tools and techniques to aid your abilities. Writing information down is a basic place to start, but using voice memos or apps will help the technologically savvy.

Accept Limitations

Accepting your poor memory will help with both depression and memory loss. Once you fully understand your limitations, you can tell others about your poor recall.

This will force them to interact with you differently and change their expectations. Rather than them (or you) being disappointed and frustrated, they will be pleasantly surprised when your memory serves you well.

Depression has found another way to disturb your life: poor memory. Whether it is from stress, executive functioning, or mood-dependent learning, depression will do its damage.

The cause is not lost, though. If you can address your mental health while taking steps to improve and modify your memory deficits, you can minimize the damage. By acting early and identifying the culprit, your memory can be preserved.