

Building the Memory Muscle: How to Help Your Child Improve His Memory

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Build and strengthen children's memory by engaging their senses and sticking to routines to help them focus, retain information, and learn new skills or talents.
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Strengthen your child's memory muscle with these six techniques.

You'd think kids wouldn't have a problem with memory—after all, parents sometimes jokingly refer to their own forgetfulness as “senior moments,” implying that age is to blame. But even young ones can have trouble retaining information. These days, it's getting even harder for children to focus, given so many distractions and stimuli coming from all sides: tablets, TV, video games, and so on. This lack of focus means they may have difficulty committing things to memory.

Memory is a necessary component of learning, not just when it comes to rote memorization, but also when it comes to building on existing knowledge to help children nurture their talents. Academic performance relies heavily on memory, but so do skills like playing an instrument: On the one hand, there's memorizing facts and figures; on the other, there's mastering chords and musical pieces. Developing your child's skills and talents is thus dependent on what he's able to learn and, more importantly, retain.

Beyond card-matching games and other memory games you can play with your child online, here are six tips to help your child strengthen his memory muscle.

1. Make sure he starts the day right

Studies over the years have shown that kids who regularly have breakfast perform better in school than those who skip the first meal of the day. After all, growing kids

need fuel after going all those hours without food. But does it matter what kind of breakfast kids have?

A Tufts University study¹ suggests that it does. The findings indicate that a breakfast of sweetened oats is better than a bowl of sugary cereal when it comes to giving kids a cognitive boost, possibly because of the higher protein and fiber content.

No time to prepare oats in the morning? Try whipping up a jar of overnight oats: Place oats, milk, honey, and other mix-ins like peanut butter or cocoa powder in a jar, shake, and store in the fridge overnight. Next morning, just top it with sliced fruit. If ready-to-eat cereal is still your go-to meal, pick one that has a low glycemic index.

Follow it up with a glass of S-26[®] GOLD Progress[®] to give him a nutritious start to his day.

2. Stick to his bedtime

Does your kid have a big test tomorrow? Make sure he gets enough sleep. Research has shown that sleep is beneficial when it comes to memory. Even taking a study break to nap can be helpful. In a study entitled “The Memory and Function of Sleep,”² authors Susanne Diekelmann and Jan Born write, “Significant sleep benefits on memory are observed after an eight-hour night of sleep, but also after shorter naps of one to two hours, and even an ultra-short nap of six minutes can improve memory retention.”

3. Allow him to daydream

If napping interferes with your kid’s nighttime sleep routine, encouraging him to take 15 minutes of quiet time after studying may help him absorb information. A study at Furman University³ in the U.S. seems to show that subjects who rested with their eyes closed after hearing a short story were better able to recall the story than subjects who were allowed to play video games for the same amount of time. So let your child take a break, but keep the gadgets and other distractions away.

4. Engage his senses

Memories tend to stick when more senses are involved, as this means that more parts of the brain are used. Take a multi-sensory approach to your child’s learning⁴, so he can retain information more effectively. If he’s learning about another country, for example, play music from that country or prepare a native dish for him to try—he can even help you prepare it.

5. Color-code

In an article entitled “The Influence of Colour on Memory Performance: A Review,”⁵ the authors write: “Colour has been found to influence memory performance by increasing our attention level and arousal. There exist robust evidences from several studies that have been conducted to explore the relationship between colour and memory performance.” Put simply, color grabs the brain’s attention, and can be used as a memory-enhancing tool. Writing your child’s notes using markers in different colors, or jotting them down on sticky notes of various hues may be able to help him better retain information.

6. Take a cue from the memory champs

There are many methods, called mnemonics, to help with memory retention, but who better to give some tricks than world memory champions? These individuals can retain staggering amounts of info like numbers, names, and so on. Here’s the surprising thing: A study published in the scientific journal *Neuron*⁶ scanned the brains of 23 world memory champs, and found that their brains were just like ordinary people’s brains, but with a fired-up connectivity. Using brain exercises, neuroscientists were even able to improve the memory of people with ordinary memory skills. What this means: An exceptional memory is not something people are born with, and you can train your child’s brain (and yours!) to remember better.

One of the memory masters’ techniques? Building a “memory palace,” or using a visual map or familiar place to store information in your mind. German Memory Championships gold medalist Boris Konrad, for example, might remember a string of unrelated words by mapping the body, from the feet up, placing words on a body part as he goes along. If your child needs to memorize a series of words, he can visualize them around your house or his room.

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