# Three Things That Can Damage Memory

When trying to enhance memory, there are lots of things you can do and many different techniques and hacks that might be successful. Often though, it is just as useful to think of the things that could be *hurting* your memory and to *stop* doing those. Here are three examples of things to stop right now!

Alcohol – Drinking can cause you to lose your memories of events that happened while you were intoxicated. This is because alcohol suppresses function in the fronto-temporal regions of the brain where most of our higher-order functions take place. To recall the events of a night of heavy drinking, one of the best techniques is to actually become intoxicated again. This due to the fact that recreating the circumstances that you were experiencing when you lay down a memory can help you retrieve. If you learned a fact in a red room then, being in a red room again might help you recall it. At the same time, if you lost your keys while drunk, then drinking a little can sometimes help you remember where you put them. Over time however drinking can cause irreparable damage to the brain by killing brain cells and this can lead to the individual experiencing more forgetfulness in general. This can eventually lead to symptoms similar to Alzheimer’s disease. Dementia caused by alcohol abuse is called Korsakoff’s syndrome.

Old Age – Age related cognitive decline is a normal phenomenon that occurs as the brain becomes less efficient at building new connections and begins losing more brain cells than it replaces. However, it is possible to slow the progression of such forgetfulness by remaining active. This means both mentally and physically active, and those older individuals who continue to play chess and read can find they maintain a better long term and short term memory. Exercise can also stem this decline, and studies have shown that cardiovascular activity can actually improve memory and even cause neurogenesis – the birth of new cells in the brain that was until recently thought impossible.

Repression – In psychotherapy the ‘psychodynamic theory’ of psychology offered by Freud is the one accepted as correct and this type of therapy is still common practice. In this theory, Freud postulated that our brain can use ‘ego defence mechanisms’ to protect our conscious mind from events or facts that we don’t want to come to terms with. Often for example we might accuse a close friend or family member of possessing the deplorable traits that we actually own ourselves. This way we remove ourselves from the focus and protect ourselves from the truth.

One of the most powerful and common of these defence mechanisms is repression. Here, rather than disguising the truth, the brain will completely block the memory so that the individual doesn’t have to deal with it consciously.