

Memory

- On several occasions I've walked into a smoke filled kitchen and only then realized that I'd been in the middle of making dinner when I left the room and promptly forgot I'd left food on the stove.
- Margaret has stopped coming to meetings and social outings because she doesn't drive and her husband Oscar doesn't remember when and where to pick her up for the ride home.
- Without reminders to refill his prescriptions, Mark can go weeks without his needed medication.
- My mother-in-law, who lives with us, washes her hands numerous times throughout the day and often forgets to turn off the faucet. One day after work, I came home to water spilling over the bathroom sink, draining through the ceiling fixtures and soaking the living room furniture.
- Frank constantly misplaces his glasses, the TV remote control, or his keys and it's almost impossible to convince him that they weren't stolen.

Assistive technology solutions are available for individuals who have memory-related problems and help by reducing memory demands and supporting people to maintain independence at home and in the community. These assistive devices include those which are specially designed and others available through local retail outlets.

Kitchen Devices

There are many ways in which problems resulting from forgetting to complete activities or tasks can be avoided. Using a microwave or toaster oven, which shuts off automatically, rather than using a standard stove or oven can reduce the risk of fires and burned foods. Discount and hardware stores carry a variety of automatic shut-off appliances such as coffee makers and irons which can function similarly. Various adaptive items are available to add this feature to standard appliances. A device called the **Stove Power Controller**, for example, is equipped with an alarm for use with conventional electric stoves and is helpful for individuals who are forgetful. The timer/alarm may be set for 15, 30, or 60-minute intervals before the automatic shut-off occurs. The **Electra Link** is another device which can adapt small appliances such as frying pans, toaster ovens and electric kettles. It works with any appliance rated up to 1200 watts to automatically switch the power off after 15 minutes.

Simple cooking timers like the **Cordon-Timer** are designed to be worn around one's neck and can be set to remind a person that the stove is on or the cake is done. It can also provide reminders to lock the door, to take medications, or to call a loved one.

Reminder Aids

Wrist watches with alarms or devices designed with timer features can serve as reminder aids by quietly alerting people at pre-set times. The **MotiVaider** is a great way to gently and quietly remind someone to perform specific functions. The tiny box vibrates at your choice of intervals as a prompt to tighten muscles, breathe deeply, or to complete a physical or mental exercise. The **Private Practice Vibration Reminder Disk** provides the same reminders, but can be attached inconspicuously on the body, under clothing, worn on the wrist or placed in a pocket.

A simple, no frills message recorder also can be a solution for those who need reminders. One could be programmed to tell a forgetful family member to meet you at the library at noon, or to remind someone of phone numbers and grocery lists, or to refill a prescription. Slightly more elaborate memo recorders, such as the **Time Pad Memo** and the **Sycom Total Recall**, have clocks and alarms which can be programmed to make specific announcements, some at the same times each day of the week. Even pager systems, some of which provide voice and text messages, can be used to remind someone on the go of appointments and next steps.

Bathroom Aids

Forgetting to turn the water faucet off can result in significant damage to homes and offices. Devices to control water in various ways can prevent problems. Electric-eye faucets, available from plumbing supply stores, turn the water on automatically when they sense a person's hands in the sink...and turn the water off when the hands exit the sink. The **Water Wand**, another option, is a stick-like attachment that hooks on a sink faucet. The water is left on all the time, but does not run until the stick is touched gently. When you stop touching the stick, the water shuts off.

Locating Devices

Specially designed devices and creative uses of others can help us locate items we have misplaced. Originally designed to be a wireless door chime, the **Remote Control Locator** can be used to locate misplaced items. Simply attach the Remote Control Locator's receiver to a frequently mislaid purse or jacket. When you need to find that item, simply push a button on the Remote Control Locator's transmitting element and the receiver will chime a "ding-dong" sound identifying where it is. Similarly, an ultrasonic chip in a small **Key Chain Alarm** will respond to your whistle by beeping. Follow the beep to your keys, TV remote, portable phone, or your glasses to which the Key Chain Alarm has been attached. This particular receiver has a range of 15 feet. The **Ultra Key Seeker** is another system for managing keys. If your keys are lost, just clap and the Key Seeker will beep and flash so that you can find them. It also comes with a pushbutton mini light to illuminate keyholes and a timer to remind you when to meet someone or when your parking meter expires.

Medication Devices

Many devices are easily obtained to help people take medications according to the correct dosages and on schedule. Familiar pill dispensers with dividers for daily and weekly dosages have been joined by others with additional helpful features. The **Pill Dispenser**, for example, opens like a book with 28 easy-to-load bins inside to hold enough pills for 4 dosages a day for a week or one dosage a day for a month. When needed, the correct pills are released into a cup at the push of a button.

Pill alarms, such as the **Pill Alert**, provide an alarm feature which can be set to ring at the time or times medication needs to be taken. Some automatically re-set to repeat the same countdown interval, have built-in water flasks, or have lights which identify the compartment that should be opened. Pill alarms can come pocket-sized or can even be housed in a wristwatch.

A more complex solution to help take medications at the right times and in the right dosages is the **CompuMed Pill Alert** automated medication dispenser which organizes a week's supply of pills and vitamins in a refillable plastic tray. The tray is locked into the easily programmed machine to deliver medications into a removable drawer. A buzzer sounds when you are to take the medication and continues to buzz until the pills are removed and the drawer is replaced. It dispenses dry oral medications and displays important instructions for all your medications.

Things you can do to make life easier:

- Use pictures, charts, or symbols to help clarify directions and explanations
- Teach tasks in “real life” situations, i.e., teaching cooking in the person’s own kitchen
- Place ash trays in sand-filled plates or cans to reduce the risk of fires
- Label photos, perhaps putting them in wallet folders, as reminders for those who do not recall familiar people and places
- Create lists or pictures of the contents of cupboards and drawers
- Install glass doors so cupboard contents can be seen at a glance
- Rely on recipes rather than memory
- Enlarge the print of existing recipes, write out family favorites, and highlight cookbook favorites
- Attach keys to a bungee cord hooked to a wrist or belt loop

