

It is very important that you see your doctor if you think you may have a memory loss problem.

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Memory Loss

Serious Memory Loss

If your doctor believes you have serious memory loss, your doctor will check your general health, including your blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol, thyroid, and vitamin B12 levels. They will review your medications to see if you are taking antihistamines, sedatives, pain relievers, or other drugs that can slow your mental processes. You will take a mental status test and in many cases you will have a CT or MRI scan to produce images of your brain.

Alzheimer's disease, the most common cause, is characterized by deposits of plaque (protein – beta amyloid) in the brain. As the disease progresses, the patient's memory and judgment decline and behavioral problems such as wandering and aggressive behavior often manifest. There are no specific tests for Alzheimer's, nor are there any means to remove the plaque.

The second leading cause of severe memory loss is vascular dementia, which develops from blockages in the small arteries in the brain. In advanced cases, the memory loss is as severe as Alzheimer's, but behavioral problems are less likely.

Other causes include Lewy body disease, Parkinson's disease, alcohol and certain infections.

It is easy to compensate for mild age-related memory lapses, but serious memory loss is a major health problem. Lifestyle adjustments and preventive medical care hold real promise for reducing the risk of memory loss in old age.

Make sure you take a friend or family member with you to see your doctor. They can tell the doctor about incidences that you may have forgotten.