



Setting up a memory system at home



NEUROPSYCHOLOGY

NHS

Highland
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The best way to remember to do things is by setting up a “memory system” at home to make it easier for you.

This means changing your environment – not changing your memory.

A good memory system will help you attend appointments, deal with letters and bills, remember to take medication, and to take the things you need when going out.

There is a lot of information in this handout. Take it step by step and read it more than once.

Step 1: Set up a visual memory station in the home

- Set up a whiteboard or cork board somewhere noticeable in the house. Boards that are half white and half corkboard are best. You will need whiteboard pens and drawing pins.
- Put it up somewhere visible and prominent in the home. The best places are usually on the wall in the kitchen (by the kettle or fridge); or by the front door in the hall (where you enter and leave the home). Choose the best place for you. Perhaps the best place for you is where you sit to relax, take phone calls or to eat your meal.



- **Corkboard:** This can be used to pin up a calendar or planner with days of the week. It can also be used to pin important letters for that week.
- **Whiteboard:** This can be used to write up priority reminders for that day, or that week.

Step 2: Set up a routine of reminders

It is important to check the memory station every day

- **Every morning** – check the day ahead.
- Check the memory station.
- What **tasks** are written on the whiteboard for **today**?
- Prepare the things you need to do and **tick them off** when you have done them.

Every evening – set it up for tomorrow

- **Clean the whiteboard of tasks** you have done.
- **Remove any paperwork** which has been dealt with today.
- **Look at the calendar** – what tasks are coming up tomorrow?
- **Check letters pinned up** – anything important tomorrow?
- **Check any notes, or ask family if needed** – anything important tomorrow?
- **Write up** the priority tasks on the whiteboard.

Getting into the routine / setting reminder alarms

- It is important to get into the habit of checking and setting up the memory station every day, **morning and evening**.
- Try and do it at the same times every day – linked with the same tasks/ routines.
- This has to be personal to you. For example, if your memory station is in the kitchen, you could check it while you are making a cup of tea in the morning. And perhaps while you are preparing dinner in the evening, you can set up the memory station for tomorrow.
- It can be helpful to **set daily alarms** to remind you to check the memory station every morning and every evening at the same time. Alarm reminders can be set on an alarm clock or your phone (using the Clock app).



Step 3: Dealing with incoming mail

Set up an “in-tray” for letters

- This could be anything you can use to store paperwork as it comes in – such as a cardboard box or a drawer in the kitchen by your memory station.
- It is a good idea to place the in-tray **beside the memory station** so you can plan with the memory station.
- Try to **be as organised as you can** with what you have – label it.



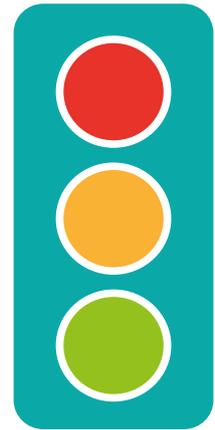
Opening letters

- Only open letters when you are beside the “in-tray”.
- If you don’t have time, leave letters in the in-tray unopened until you have **plenty of time**.
- When you have time, open the letter beside your in-tray.
- Read it and check for any actions (things you need to do).
- Mark any tasks or actions in the letter with a highlighter pen.
- If there is a date or appointment – write it up on the calendar.
- If there is something you need to do today or this week (a priority task), write it up on the whiteboard.



Tasks for this week – take action

- If the task is for this week, pin the letter to the memory station and write it up on the whiteboard.



Tasks for the future – plan ahead

- If there is a deadline coming up, or an appointment to attend – write it up on the memory station calendar.
- Place the letter in the in-tray so you can find it next week if needed.

Tasks complete – job done!

- If you can complete any task immediately, do this, and then destroy or file the letter.
- Try to throw away any letters you do not need to keep.
- If you do need to keep the letter, put it away in a labelled folder where you can find it easily later.



No task/junk mail

- Throw the letter away or shred it. Don't be tempted to keep things you don't need. They will just pile up.



Step 4: Check-out / Check-in system

Remembering to take the things you need

- Try to always leave by the same door.
- By that door, set up a place for all the things you need.
- This could be a coat stand, a hall table with a drawer, or even boxes to organise your things.
- There could be boxes or drawers for each family member if you have to help others “check out” and “check in”.
- Include a set place for everything:
 - *Keys in a bowl, drawer or hanging on a peg near the door.*
 - *Coat and bag hanging next to the door.*
 - *Things for school or work in boxes and on pegs by the door.*



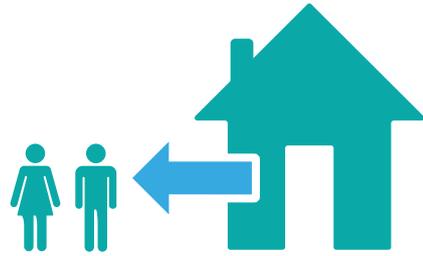
Visual reminder or checklist

- Put up a checklist reminder on the back of the door.
- It should be a checklist of things you need to take. Make it personal to you.
- The reminder can be words, a printed photograph of your own things, or pictures.



Check-out (leaving home)

- Take your time.
- Collect the things you need.
- Check the check-list before you leave.



Check-in (getting back home)

- Don't rush ahead to the next thing.
- Stop, take your time.
- Don't leave the area until you have placed items away where they go.



You can set the same system up at a regular work space, such as when you get to your desk.

Step 5: Taking medication

It can be important to take medication at a set time, or before/after food. Always read the label and ask the Pharmacist if you have any questions. You can ask for a free “structured medication review” with your pharmacist.

Getting organised

- Ask the pharmacy for a blister pack (dosette box).
- Or set up your own one at home.
- Place the box where you will see it. Link this with your routine – for example, by the memory station or by the kettle. Perhaps by the place you sit to eat meals.



Set alarms

- Set daily alarms to help you remember.
- This can be on your phone, an alarm clock or a smart speaker.

Step 6: Troubleshooting

If you forget to do something, it is not you, it's the system!

- Try reviewing the system.
- Which step was missed?
- How can you make sure that step is covered next time?
- Talk it over with family – can they spot where the system could be improved?
- If you are asked to do something, make sure you ask that person to wait – go to the memory station and make a note while the person is still there, or still on the phone.
- If you make notes while you are out, go straight to the memory station and write up any important actions.

Electronic systems

The systems used for reminders can be paper or can be electronic (perhaps on your smart phone or a smart speaker, such as Alexa). This is up to you and you can choose what suits you best.



Tips for family/supporters

- Support your family member to **independently** use the memory station. Don't do it for them, unless they ask you to. Try to support them to get in the routine themselves.
- If there is something important to be remembered, you will have to support use of the system. This might mean you have to adjust what you might have done in the past.
- Wait until you both feel calm and relaxed, so you can both give full attention to the task.
- Wait until you can take time to be beside the memory station together.
- You or they can check the system, rather than asking each other. If a task is not written up, or ticked off, then the system may need adjustment – how can you support this?





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Devised by: Dr Ruth Sumpter, Consultant Clinical Neuropsychologist		

