

Memory Book

A Useful Tool



**BRAIN ANEURYSM
FOUNDATION**

Raising Awareness. Ending Fear.™

OUR MISSION

Provide information about and raise awareness of the symptoms and risk factors of brain aneurysms to prevent ruptures and subsequent death and disability.

Work with medical communities to provide support networks for patients and families.

Advance research to improve patients' outcomes and save lives.



Most survivors have memory problems and many cannot remember to do things during the day. If possible, consultation with an outpatient speech therapist to evaluate and treat cognitive deficits is beneficial. Your nurse who works with your neurosurgeon or neurologist can help you obtain this evaluation. Survivors with memory problems often benefit from learning to use a memory book. This useful tool is based on the principle that practice produces new habits over time.



Imagine a survivor who has returned home following a ruptured aneurysm and several weeks of living in a rehabilitation facility. She has recovered enough to stay at home during the day while her husband goes to work, but gets little accomplished while he is gone. She has trouble getting organized and gets distracted if she tries to do too many things at once. It is not unusual for her husband to return home from work and find the wet laundry still in the machine because she did not remember to move the clothes to the dryer. She has trouble taking her noon dose of medications and on a few occasions has taken it twice.

If her husband is uninformed about why this is happening, he might become frustrated and angry because his wife “just doesn’t try,” or “just wants me to do it all.” After returning home to disorder, he might speak harshly to her, suggesting that she is not working at recovery or that she is “lazy.” Hearing these words, she might conclude that he is correct and that she is worthless. As neither understands why she is having these problems, no solution emerges, and frustrations and distress build.



Contrast the uninformed husband to one who knows that his wife's disorganization and poor memory are the result of the aneurysm and who has some ideas about how to teach her to use a memory book to help her carry out various tasks while he is gone during the day.

The informed husband first shifts his explanation from an emotional one ("she just isn't trying") to a behavioral one ("she can't remember to do what she has planned"). He shifts his ideas about why she is making these mistakes from a blaming attitude ("she's doing this on purpose") to an informed attitude ("she has memory problems because of damage to her brain from the aneurysm rupture"). Armed with information, the husband is better able to design a treatment plan that will help his wife learn how to spend her time at home in a more productive, safer, more satisfying way. He is less frustrated, less harsh, and more forgiving of her errors. The survivor, encouraged instead of criticized, makes a better effort, and feels more positive in the process.

With a basic understanding of behavior principles, the husband can design a plan to systematically teach his wife to use a memory book. First, he needs to analyze the problem. Simply giving her a list of things to do will not be effective, as she will forget to consult the list during the day. The husband must help his wife build a new habit of looking at the memory book frequently throughout the day and using lists in the book to organize what she wants to accomplish while he is away at work.

The treatment plan used by the husband or other caregiver to encourage the development of future memory skills with a memory book is based on the principle that practice produces results. Once the habit is established, the survivor is increasingly capable of planning and following through on her plans without help. The plan starts with active involvement from the husband, and as the wife practices the skill, it turns into a habit. This process is repeated with new tasks to learn until the recovery process is complete.

In this case, the key skill learned by the wife is to consult her memory book on an hourly basis and to follow the plans she and her husband established the day before. By using cues to prompt repetitive practice, the husband helps his wife learn to use a list to accomplish her goals for the day.

There are many systems that have been designed to assist memory-impaired people remember to do what they have planned. Below is a simple template for learning to use a memory book.

1. Plan the next day and write down goals.
2. Break the day into one- to two-hour segments.
3. Write goals for each segment.
 - 10:00 a.m. “Put laundry in washing machine and start”
 - 11:00 a.m. “Take laundry from washing machine and place in dryer”
 - 12:00 p.m. “Take laundry from dryer, sort and fold”
4. Set a watch or smartphone timer to beep at two-hour intervals. It is helpful for the caregiver to call every two hours to make sure the memory book is available and was consulted at the right time.
5. At each time interval, the survivor records the activities for the previous hour and carries out the tasks designated for the next hour.
6. At the end of the day, the caregiver and survivor review the day’s progress. Adjustments are made until the survivor can follow the schedule independently. In our example, phone calls and the beeping watch or smartphone would not be needed after the habit of using the book is established. The need or ability of a survivor to use these suggestions depend on the extent of impairment as well as the degree of support that is available.

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Brain Aneurysm Foundation

269 Hanover Street, Building 3 | Hanover, MA 02339

(888) 272-4602 | (781) 826-5556