

Everyday Memory Strategy Use in Healthy Adults Across the Lifespan: Results From an Online Survey

How often do people use strategies to help their memory in everyday life? Are certain strategies used more often than others and does the strategy use in everyday life increase as we get older? While a number of questionnaires exist to assess memory strategy use in the general population, they have been developed quite a long time ago and do not assess the use of external strategies involving technology (e.g., electronic reminders, etc.). It is also unclear how frequently individuals across the adult lifespan expect such memory strategies to be used by people in age groups other than their own. For example, do members of the general public believe that older adults use memory aiding strategies more often than younger adults and, if so, which strategies do they believe are used more often by older adults?

To address these gaps in the current knowledge, researchers at the University of Hertfordshire developed a new everyday memory strategy use questionnaire. The questionnaire assessed the use of the following four types of strategies: internal strategies (e.g., mentally retracing one's steps to find the lost keys), external non-electronic aids (e.g., using a paper calendar for appointments), external electronic aids (e.g., using reminders on the phone) and multiple strategies (i.e., using more than one strategy simultaneously). The questions were created based on the real data collected in a previous diary study in which young and older individuals recorded memory strategies every time they used them in their daily lives.

This new questionnaire was circulated on various social media platforms and several branches of the University of 3rd Age (U3A) for a period of 8 months between January 2021 and August 2021. Participants had to rate the frequency with which they have used different strategies to aid memory in their own life and then rate how frequently they expected people in their 20s, 40s, 60s and 80s to use the same memory strategies. In addition, participants completed questionnaires about their mood, business, and demographic details.

For the first study aim, concerning the frequency of memory strategy use across different age groups, responses from 531 participants were analysed. Participants were divided into three age groups, which included 226 young (aged 18-39), 135 middle-aged (aged 40-59) and 170 older (aged 60-91) adults. Results showed that there were no age differences in the overall frequency with which participants reported to use various memory strategies in their daily life. In addition, a strong preference for using external memory aids/strategies was observed across all age groups. However, while young and middle-aged adults reported using electronic external memory aids more often than older adults, middle-aged and older individuals reported using non-electronic external memory aids more often than younger adults.

For the second study aim regarding how people view memory strategy use in others, the data from 310 participants were analysed. Results showed strong stereotypical views towards memory strategy use and ageing. Irrespective of participants' own age, all participants believed that increasing age is generally associated with increased use of memory strategies. Such stereotypical views are surprising given the results of recent diary studies showing no significant age effects in the overall frequency of strategies people use to aid their memory.

In summary, this study showed that the newly developed questionnaire can assess the frequency of various memory strategy use in everyday life across the adult lifespan and can be used in the future clinical and research work on memory functioning in everyday life. Furthermore, this study confirmed that there still exist strong stereotypical views towards memory and ageing, which highlights the need to raise awareness on this matter in our society and reduce age-related stereotypes.

The research team at the University of Hertfordshire would like to thank all those who kindly volunteered to take part in our study and extend special thanks to the Chairs of many U3A branches for helping us with the recruitment. Your help and contribution to our research is greatly appreciated.

If you have any follow up question in relation to these findings, please email Dr Brigita Brazauskiene at b.brazauskiene@herts.ac.uk.

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