



Memory Q: Does Stress Affect Your Memory and If So, How?

by award-winning author / stress-relief expert Susie Mantell

A: Absolutely! One very simple way to see this is if you think of the energy and capability of the human system as a pie. This pie has considerable expansiveness in its capacity, but ultimately, there is a finite amount of physical and emotional energy for processing available to any of us in any given moment. Picture the pie being portioned out with slices pre-designated for work, day-to-day living processes like walking, eating, reading etc., attention to family and friends, energy for necessary bodily functions: breathing, digestion, circulation, immune function, etc. Now imagine that there is a sliver "on reserve" for crises.

7a.m. You wake up with a slight low backache. Then, a spot on the jacket you'd planned to wear for your presentation that day takes a bit of that "reserve slice" to find something else to wear and quickly change into. Now, a little more gets used for your child who wakes with a miserable cold and the energy required to find child care so you can get to work. A bit of the reserve gets called upon now, because you are late to work and sitting in traffic. You enter the building 20 minutes late and, Oh, no! the elevator's out of order. You must walk up 4 flights to find there's a small leak over your desk. Now you must pack up and move into a temporary office. Nothing "life and death" here, just stress.

As you're packing, the phone rings and you learn that FedEx has lost your presentation materials for today, and that back problem is beginning to really ache. You call the doctor to see if he can squeeze you in this week and are put on "hold" as you unpack your office necessities. 2 minutes ... 5 minutes ... (*Your back is killing you, client due in 30 minutes*) and ... 9 minutes on "hold." When you finally get through to make an appointment, a fairly cranky receptionist tells you that your doctor is out of town, and she reminds you that your account is past-due. (You paid that bill!) *"Please send us a copy of the cancelled check? etc., etc.,"* and it's only 10 a.m.! Email from you mom reminds you that you forgot your sister's birthday yesterday. How can you remember a birthday? You are on System Overload.

Now this is an extreme example of a stressful day, but can you begin to appreciate how your reserve power can be depleted by many such small, cumulative stressors? Imagine when that's compounded more serious matters like your department downsizing, or the loss of a parent, by job relocation or divorce or chemotherapy or a sick loved one or any number of huge, unavoidable stressors. Understandably, when our physical and emotional energy is being drained off by stressful experiences, there is simply less energy of all kinds for us to retain phone numbers, lunch dates, hair-cut appointments, birthdays or school plays.

© 2000, 2008, 2010 Susie Mantell, Relax Intuit™ LLC. All Rights Reserved. Federal law prohibits use of this content in whole or in part without the express written consent of Relax Intuit™ LLC. For permission to use, please email the complete text of the specific article and its requested use to info@relaxintuit.com. *Award-winning stress-relief expert Susie Mantell is the author of the exquisitely soothing relaxation audiobook, "Your Present: A Half-Hour of Peace," clinically approved to relieve symptoms associated with health-related, work-related, chronic and traumatic stress. Featured in The Los Angeles Times, NBC, ABC, CBS-TV, Town & Country, The American Pain Society, Hazelden and The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, listeners include The Mayo Clinic, Memorial Sloan-Kettering, The Betty Ford Center, V.A. Hospitals and Canyon Ranch ("#1 Spa"--Conde Nast Traveler). Customizing stress-reduction for Fortune 500 companies, distinguished medical centers and spas, Mantell's multi-sensory, mind-body techniques appear in national media, medical and corporate publications. Susie Mantell's stress-relief & wellness tips are intended as an adjunct to, not a substitute for, professional health care. Order "Your Present: A Half-Hour of Peace" and enjoy more of Susie Mantell's stress-relief tips at www.relaxintuit.com*

CONTINUED



Memory: Does stress affect your memory and how? by award-winning author / stress-relief expert Susie Mantell

Much research is being done in the area of memory, emotions and stress. Many scientists would now say these reside not only in our heads as previously believed, but in fact, at a cellular level with information communicated constantly throughout the body by peptide transmitters. One very readable book on this subject is *"Molecules of Emotion"* by Dr. Candace Pert, a highly regarded bench scientist at Georgetown. Another terrific book that clearly explains how it is that stress plays a tremendous role in our physical and mental health, is *"Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers"* by Robert M. Sapolsky.

The limbic area of the brain is where we are believed to process emotions and images and determine which are 'just passing through,' and which we'll retain for future reference. The amygdala is involved with mood and the conscious emotional response to an event, whether positive or negative. It's responsible for the tension you feel when you unexpectedly smell smoke. It is also what tells you, "Man in ski mask in alley = Danger." Some call the hippocampus the "Record Button." Significant emotional connections and memories from early childhood, or a baby's birth, or a profound loss can stay for a lifetime, even when we can't recall where we left our keys. Deep emotional connections to both positive and negative events often create stronger memories. The limbic system and hypothalamus are responsible for sensory experience, pleasure, pain, attraction, revulsion, anxiety, etc. So it makes a lot of sense that stress could impact memory.

There's interesting work being done in genetics as well as other fields, regarding how "inevitable" memory loss is/is not in healthy aging, absent debilitating illness. There are suggestions that keeping the mind nimble and the body active in senior years may greatly enhance memory, as well as overall quality of life. As with exercising a muscle for strength, the "use it or lose it" principle seems to apply vis-a-vis memory. A great book on this subject is *"Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain"* by John R. Ratey.

Perhaps like me, you've had the experience when there's too much information coming in all at once that your memory is "out of ram." That's when we need to pause, get some fresh air, shift gears and relax a bit. Avoiding stress where possible, and releasing stress in ways that are pleasurable and personally effective can, in fact, help us process and retain information we wish to access again more readily. (*Now, if we can just remember to do it!*)

© 2000, 2008, 2010 Susie Mantell, Relax Intuit™ LLC. All Rights Reserved. Federal law prohibits use of this content in whole or in part without the express written consent of Relax Intuit™ LLC. For permission to use, please email the complete text of the specific article and its requested use to info@relaxintuit.com. **Award-winning stress-relief expert Susie Mantell is the author of the exquisitely soothing relaxation audiobook, "Your Present: A Half-Hour of Peace," clinically approved to relieve symptoms associated with health-related, work-related, chronic and traumatic stress. Featured in The Los Angeles Times, NBC, ABC, CBS-TV, Town & Country, The American Pain Society, Hazelden and The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, listeners include The Mayo Clinic, Memorial Sloan-Kettering, The Betty Ford Center, V.A. Hospitals and Canyon Ranch ("#1 Spa"--Conde Nast Traveler). Customizing stress-reduction for Fortune 500 companies, distinguished medical centers and spas, Mantell's multi-sensory, mind-body techniques appear in national media, medical and corporate publications. Susie Mantell's stress-relief & wellness tips are intended as an adjunct to, not a substitute for, professional health care. Order "Your Present: A Half-Hour of Peace" and enjoy more of Susie Mantell's stress-relief tips at www.relaxintuit.com**

