

Scent Boosts Memory

Memory and scent are tightly linked. The nerves that recognize scent travel straight to the brain's memory center, which is why familiar scents often remind us of events from the past.

Olfactory training is when people smell intense scents to improve this system. It has helped people recover their sense of smell after COVID, and sharpens memory in older adults.

Three Steps to Better Memory

1. Purchase an aromatherapy diffuser (preferably one that has an off-timer. Alternatively you can plug it into an outlet timer to shut off)
2. Purchase 7 essential oils that you like. Rotate them randomly so you get a different scent every night.
3. Every night, turn it on as you go to sleep. Program the diffuser to shut off after 2 hours.

This technique was tested in older adults with mild cognitive problems. After 6 months, it improved their memory 226% compared to a placebo group that used fake aromatherapy. There were also improvements in the temporal lobes (that are involved in memory) on brain imaging.

Note: in the research they used a Diffuser World machine with these oils: rose, orange, eucalyptus, lemon, peppermint, rosemary, and lavender; from The Essential Oil Company, Portland, OR. However, any system and combination of scents should work.

—Chris Aiken, M.D., updated 8/3/2024

