

When Mumnesia Hits

New mothers often experience bouts of forgetfulness, known as mumnesia, after giving birth. Here **MH** gives you the lowdown on why your memory may not be as sharp as it used to be and what you can do to get it back in shape.

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New mums, have a browse through your mobile phones. Do you have more notes and reminders stored in it than before you gave birth? Or if you're a pen to paper kind of girl, do you have lots of Post-it notes around your house filled with tasks and reminders? If the answer is yes, then you might be experiencing mumnesia.

Mumnesia – sometimes known as mummy brain – refers to memory challenges new mothers face after they have given birth. Some women may even start experiencing these bouts of forgetfulness during their pregnancy. Mumnesia may cause mothers to forget things they used to remember easily such as where they placed their things, meetings and appointments, and names of people.



Although there is insufficient scientific evidence on whether *Munnesia* actually exists, it is not uncommon for new mothers to complain of their increasing lapses in memory.

Why Am I So Forgetful?

New mothers are faced with numerous challenges once they have given birth, resulting in higher stress levels as well as endless sleepless nights.

Here, we give you the possible reasons why new mothers are particularly vulnerable to poor memory.

Changes in priorities

Once their little bundle of joy arrives, mothers' main priority will automatically shift to their baby. New mothers may especially feel more overwhelmed with the arrival of this tiny being whom they are now responsible for raising. Taking care of a newborn child clearly takes up so much of a mother's time already that everything else is bumped down to second place.

With all the new information that a mother's brain is dealing with, it is no wonder that mothers tend to be more forgetful after giving birth.

Stress

The arrival of a newborn child undeniably brings on added stress for new mothers. The challenge of raising a child can be daunting, and worrying seems to be the default feeling new mothers have 24/7. Add to that the never-ending list of things to do, stress levels experienced by new mothers can be overwhelming. It is therefore understandable that your memory isn't as sharp as it used to be.

Sleep deprivation

A lack of sleep due to new motherhood priorities may also contribute to *munnesia*. A newborn child requires a mother's undivided attention, no matter what time of day (or night) it is. Mothers

are occupied with nighttime feedings, changing dirty diapers, waking up in the middle of the night to soothe their crying baby, and the list goes on. For working mothers, their sleep deprivation may be exacerbated by the added worry of work the next day.

All these new motherhood priorities, coupled with their existing duties, make getting some proper shut-eye almost impossible.

thus they are able to manage their daily routines better.

For most mothers, their less than sharp memories may just be their body's way of telling them that they need to slow down and have a rest. But what if your bouts of forgetfulness are a telling sign of something more serious?

Dr Tan Eng Loy, consultant at the Department of Obstetrics

It is no surprise then that mothers experience frequent bouts of forgetfulness on the arrival of their children.

Changes in hormone levels

According to Dr Watt Wing Fong, specialist in Obstetrics and Gynaecology and consultant at Raffles Women's Centre, changes in hormone levels of mothers may lead to poor memory. Some research has shown that there is an increase in the levels of progesterone, oestrogen and oxytocin in mothers during their pregnancy. These high levels of pregnancy hormones may have an effect on the neurons in the brain, which may cause mothers to be more prone to forgetfulness even after delivering the baby.

Will My Memory Ever Go Back to Normal?

Every mother's memory may take different lengths of time to improve. However, Dr Watt says that the memory of most mothers "recover within one year after the delivery of their child". This may be due to mothers settling into their new roles,

& Gynaecology at Singapore General Hospital says, "If persistent forgetfulness is causing problems both at home or at work that may lead to danger concerns, it may be time for the new mother to seek help and advice." These concerns may include forgetting to turn off the stove at home or forgetting and leaving the baby locked in the car.

Dr Tan also explains that if you had a pregnancy complicated by medical conditions, it may also be an indication that the forgetfulness you are experiencing could be an underlying symptom of a serious medical issue. "It might be worthwhile for the mother to get an early medical assessment to exclude the possibility of serious medical complications," says Dr Tan.

Tips for a Better Memory

First off, if you are a new mother, the best thing to do is to realise that your memory may not be as sharp as it



used to be for the time being. "Accept that you will not be able to do everything and try to scale back your responsibility," says Dr Watt. Do not be too critical on yourself whenever you forget the seemingly simplest of things.

Here are some tips to improve your memory and make your motherhood journey that little bit easier.

Baby's naptime is your naptime too

It may seem like the best time to finish other tasks that need to get done is when your baby is sound asleep. However, your baby's naptime should really be a time for you to get some sleep too. This can help you to partly make up for the hours of sleep that you will inevitably lose when nighttime falls. This much

needed shut-eye will help your brain to re-energise, thus providing yourself with a memory boost.

Write, write, write

Writing things down is one of the easiest ways for you to ease the burden on your poor memory. Don't force yourself to remember every single thing that you are supposed to do throughout the day. Write your tasks down so that there will be less chance of you forgetting them completely. Go over your list of things to do to ensure that nothing has been forgotten.

Alternatively, you can set alarms on your phone to remind yourself of the different tasks that need to be done for the day.

Do less

Multitasking is a mother's forte, and even more so when there is

a new baby at home. While you may feel like you need to do everything at once to keep up with the mounting list of things to do, it is important to slow down and focus on one thing at a time. Trying to juggle too many things can stretch your mind and body to its limits, and this will not do any good to your memory.

Keep moving

Being physically active will ensure that both your mind and body get their exercise. You don't necessarily have to go to the gym or play sports to remain active. Even simple stretching exercises can help you to re-energise and allow your mind to focus. Walking is also a great way to refresh your mind and body – and as a bonus you can bring your baby out on your walk too. ■



While it is easier said than done - keep the stress levels to a minimum as this may also affect your memory.