

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategies for Visuospatial Problems

➤ **BE ORGANIZED**

- Have a designated place for frequently used items.

➤ **USE PROPER LIGHTING**

- Halogen is better than incandescent or fluorescent
- The light should be coming from behind or the side to minimize glare
- Have enough light in places where you “work” most

➤ **INCREASE CONTRAST**

- Use black on white or vice versa, or bright colors
- Pour coffee into white cups, put cereal into dark bowls, use white plates on dark placemats
- Use a felt tip pen, not a ball point
- Mark Items with bright color or tactile dots to allow for ease with locating. Use tactile dots, stickers or fabric paint in orange, green or red to designate ON/OFF.
- Place bright sticker or use color case for cell phone for ease with finding
- Place colored ring around most used key for ease with differentiation.
- Color code files in office or dry goods in different colored containers in kitchen (flour, sugar, etc.)
- Make stairways safer by placing a brightly colored strip of tape along the edge of each step.
- Replace/paint electrical outlet covers in a color that contrasts the wall

➤ **CONTROL GLARE**

- Change window blinds to up-slanted position to allow nature light in with minimizing glare
- Cover shiny surfaces with a cloth.
- Wear amber or dark yellow fit over, or clip-ons and a visor outside. Wear yellow clip-ons inside if needed and a night while driving.
- Change the angle of computer or television screen away from light source to minimize glare.

➤ **READING STRATEGIES**

- Use good lighting.
- Try large print books and set computer/device text enlargers. Use text enlarging software on your computer

- Turn your smart phone sideways or long ways so that the keyboard is larger.
- Use a bookmark to “underline” current line of text you are reading.
- Try talking books for leisure reading. The Library of Congress has thousands of titles and they will deliver them for free in the mail if you complete an online application for the visually impaired.
- Use a reading machine to significantly enlarge text. There are a great variety of machines based on your needs. Your therapist will help you navigate the options.

Visit the Lighthouse for the Blind consumer store in Chicago (321-997-3683) or Glenview (847-510-6200) to try reading devices, talking watches, and other low vision aides (Open M-F from 9-5:00 pm). Or try the retail store called Eye Can See Clearly Now for similar items (8430 Gross Point Rd #103, Skokie, IL, 847 612-9094). Your therapist also has catalogs with low vision devices that can be ordered through the mail.

➤ **USE HELPFUL DEVICES**

- Talking watches
- Talking alarm clock
- Large numbered phone
- Siri, or other voice activation enabled smart phones
- Reading machine
- Magnifiers with light feature

➤ **DECLUTTER ALL SURFACES**

- Decrease the amount of scanning necessary.

Strategies for Focus and Maximizing Attention Span

- **MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS**
- **PRACTICE “TIMED ATTENTION”**
 - Start by setting a timer for 5 minutes and focus on one task only (i.e. washing dishes, organizing the office, memory games). Force yourself to complete the time, even if the phone rings.
 - Then, increase the time in increments. Use this to help accomplish tasks.
 - Set reasonable goals in order to complete bigger tasks.
- **PERFORM SIMPLE, SENSORY PROCESSING/JOINT COMPRESSION EXERCISES**
 - This will help “reset” your brain and regain focus. These exercises can also be used as alternative “behaviors” or substitute behaviors if there are unwanted or repetitive behaviors. *Your OT will issue a specific exercise program, if appropriate.*
 - **Basic Joint Compression**
 - Pushing your hands together or doing a chair push up are examples of joint compression. This will have effects on your brain chemistry and can help you to refocus.
 - **Deep Pressure**
 - Self-massage or giving yourself a hug are examples of deep pressure. Physiologically, this creates a calming response.

Strategies for Outdoor Navigation

- Use routine routes and nearby familiar streets for walking the dog, exercising or shopping. Memorizing all the street names is not important. Use landmarks such as a bank, restaurant, or buildings that stand out to help you orient to location.
- Use smart phone GPS maps to search for directions, stores or businesses, and for telling you your current location. Voice activation, like Siri on the iPhone, works well for this purpose.
- Use the compass on your smart phone (or a good old fashion pocket compass) to assist you.
- Use the bus locator app on the smart phone and make an icon for your favorite bus routes.
- If you get turned around walking in the city, go into a business or high rise to ask for directions. Avoid asking anyone suspicious.
- Carry a card at all times with your address on it. You can show this to a cab driver to assist you with getting home or to more easily ask for directions.
- If getting turned around becomes a more frequent problem, avoid going out alone. If you enjoy walking outside, schedule a weekly time to go with someone, so you can continue.
- ***If having trouble with driving, please speak to your doctor about getting a Rehabilitation Driving Evaluation to assure you are safe***

Home Safety Strategies

➤ STAIR SAFETY

- Proper hand rails are essential. Routinely use hand rail each time descending or ascending stairs.
- Keep stairs clear of household items.
- Avoid carrying anything up and down stairs; always have at least one hand free to hold the rail.
- Place a contrasting colored non-slip rug at bottom of steps to more easily see the last steps (especially if all the same flooring).

➤ SMOKE DETECTORS AND CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS

- Check all on regular basis to ensure they are working correctly. I often recommend having a carbon monoxide detector in the kitchen if it is not an open lay out. The detector could alert you if a gas burner has been opened/left on and is leaking gas.

➤ DOOR AND LOCKING DEVICES

- There are many devices out there for hidden door locks, door alarms, and cabinet locks if wandering or other safety issues arise. Your therapist will help you decide the best ones for you.

➤ EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

- Always have a family plan for different types of emergencies.
- Place a telephone number list near the most used home phone with most important numbers.
- Move telephones to spots where they would be accessible from the floor if a fall was to occur (such as a table as opposed to mounted on wall up high).

Kitchen Safety

- Avoid using the stove unsupervised or if there is any concern due to decreased memory or attention span. If there is significant risk of danger, unplug or use a plug in strip that is out of sight to turn off when not in use by other family members.
- Highlight OFF position with colored fabric paint or sticker to enhance visual cueing.
- Use an auto stove turn off system. This system will shut the stove off if sensor notes the person has left the room. This only works with electric stoves. They can be purchased on the following websites.
 - www.alzstore.com
 - www.thiscaringhome.org
- Use microwave, toaster oven and electric kettles instead. Choose simple models with fewer choices on the display.
- Buy food items that do not require cooking (i.e. sandwich fixings, cold cereal, fruit, yogurt, deli items, etc.)

- Use a kitchen timer while cooking. Bring the phone with you into the kitchen and do not leave the kitchen until the food is finished. Avoid multi-tasking and distractions.
- Place non-food items in a different place than food items. Some cleaning packaging looks similar to food items.
- Designate a spot for snacks and healthy food items, so there is less searching to find favorite items. Designate a shelf in the refrigerator and a spot in the cupboard or pantry as your go to place for a quick snack.
- Clean out old or expired food from the refrigerator on a regular basis. Schedule weekly if needed.

Strategies for Meal Preparation

- Keep a food log if meals are overlooked at times or weight loss has occurred. This could be a notebook in the kitchen where each day the food that has been consumed is written down.
- Stock the refrigerator and freezer with easy prep options.
- Organize items in the refrigerator for ease and quick visual scanning. Place more frequently used items in easy to see and reach places, such as in the door.
- Use the microwave or toaster oven instead of the stove for quick prep. Choose a model that has timed auto shut off and simple dials.
- Schedule bi-weekly times to clean out any expired foods.
- Plan ingredients for meals ahead of time and place on a shopping list. Create a custom shopping list where favorite items can be checked off easily and helps cue for most used items.
- Meal planning/organization: place all ingredients on counter to the right; after added move it to the left side of the food prep station, to avoid doubling. Another strategy is to write out ingredients and cross off as you go.

Strategies for Eating

- Eliminate distractions (turn off TV, music)
- Use finger foods or foods that require no cutting or extra steps to manage.
- Use contrasting colors (placemat that contrasts with the table, plate that contrasts with the placemat).
- Only set out silverware that is needed
- Present one food item at a time if necessary
- Try frequent, small meals for short attention spans
- Leave nutritious finger foods around house for snacks
- Check if dentures are loose (especially if individual has lost weight)
- Always eat with the individual when possible

Bathroom Safety

- Replace throw rugs with non-slip rugs.
- Use appropriate bathroom safety equipment, such as, grab bars, raised toilet seat, bath bench and hand held shower head. *Everyone is different-your therapist will recommend what is best for you.*
- Avoid clutter, especially on the floor leading to and around the bathroom for greater safety.
- Use a night light

- **FOR THOSE WITH INCONTINENCE**
 - Create an “incontinence station” next to the toilet with all needed supplies and a small garbage can.
 - Use best protection strategy to avoid accidents, your therapist will guide you.
 - Practice timed voiding-eliminating every 2-3 hours during the day
 - Perform Kegel’s exercises-squeezing the urine muscle daily.

Strategies for Bathing

- Try scheduling bath time on specific days and set up a routine.
- Make sure bathroom is warm and comfortable. Have everything set up and ready.
- Take off clothing at very last minute.
- Wash individual’s face and hands separately. Avoid splashing water on individual’s face
- Use dry shampoo for hair if needed, or go to a salon for a wash and style once a week.
- With showers, use a hand-held nozzle and work from the feet up.
- Give individual something to hold and focus on , such as a washcloth
- Try a sponge bath instead.

Strategies for Dressing

- Hang matching clothing in closet together or if needed laid out.
- Organize drawers and closet for favorite items to be most accessible. Label closet or drawers if necessary.
- Place shirts on the bed backwards, then place arms in and then over the head.

- **SUGGESTIONS FOR CLOTHING CHOICES**
 - Open collar shirts and dresses
 - Slip on, Velcro tabbed shoes - avoid ill-fitting shoes like flimsy slippers to avoid falls
 - Clothes that are one size larger than normal, avoid tight fitting clothes
 - Shirts and dresses that pull over the head
 - Elastic waist pants
 - Avoid zippers and buttons

- Avoid busy patterns
- Use bright fabric paint to highlight tags that are hard to see
- Keep button up shirts buttoned except for the top 3 buttons when laundering, so in effect, they become pull-over shirts.

Medication Management

- Place your pills in a prominent location, where you will be visually reminded to take them.
- Take your pills at the same time(s) each day.
- Set an alarm to go off if you are forgetting to take your pills. Try using an alarm on your phone.
- Use a pill organizer. Organize the pills once a week. Ask someone to help you if this task is difficult.
- Place the pill organizer next to a clock displaying the date or your calendar, to make sure you are taking the pills on the right day.
- Buy an automatic pill dispenser. This device can be filled once every 2-3 weeks. It beeps at the correct times each day and dispenses the pills. When the device is turned over to remove pills, it resets.
- Use a preprinted, organized checklist for non-pill meds such as eye drops or inhalers.
<http://www.epill.com/medtime.html>
<http://www.amazon.com/Med-lert-Automatic-Dispenser-Single/dp/B002B51358>

Schedule Management

- **PROBLEMS WITH REMEMBERING DATE AND TIME**
 - Buy a large clock that displays the day and date. These are available at home stores and Walgreens.
<http://www.dynamic-living.com/product/big-digital-led-calendar-clock/#clear>
<http://www.kmart.com/search=large%20display%20clock%20date%20day?kmaxlar=1>
 - Place clock next to calendar to easily determine time and date.
 - Post a medium-sized dry erase board in a prominent place (in the kitchen or across from your favorite chair). Pick a time to fill out the board each day (in the evening or first thing in the morning). Write the date at the top and then each activity or appointment occurring that day. Write the time next to each activity.
- **FOR WALL CALENDARS**
 - Buy a calendar with large squares and a bold font. Write in dark pen or sharpie. Try to write in large print, as neatly as possible.
- **FOR DAILY PLANNERS**
 - Determine what layout will be best for you. If you have a lot of activities each day, select a planner that has one day per page. If you like to see the entire week in front of you, select a planner that displays the entire week on two pages.
- **SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THOSE WITH VISUALSPACIAL DIFFICULTY**
 - Choose a calendar that is visually simple-no extra designs or pictures. The day of week and date must be prominently displayed.

- Use highlighters to draw eyes to most important information.
 - Color code entries, such as using red pen for doctor's appointments.
 - Use large block lettering. Give space between each letter.
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- Use maximum contrast, avoid light on light background and dark on dark background.
 - Use fine tip pen or fine tip sharpie for greater ease with readability.
 - Use talking watch or clock. Many talking watches will say the time with one button and the date with another

Using the Telephone or TV Remote

- Place list of important telephone numbers next to each telephone.
- Try purchasing a phone with a receiver rather than a cordless phone. It is easier to pick up/hang up compared to the cordless phone.
- Purchase the "Memory Phone": this is a phone displaying pictures of important people. You push the picture of the person you want to call and the phone dials this number automatically.
<http://www.alzstore.com/Alzheimers/memory-phone.htm>
<http://alzstore.com/Alzheimers/photo-memory-phone-and-answering-machine.htm>
- TV REMOTE: Put black tape over all buttons except the on/off switch, volume and channels.
- Place a list of top 5-10 television channels next to or on back of the television remote
- Purchase a TV remote with only a few important buttons.
<http://www.amazon.com/Tek-Pal-Button-Remote-Control/dp/B0016RNSHS>
- Highlight with stickers, tactile bumps or color the most important buttons to differentiate.
- **The BEST, SIMPLE TV remote available right now is called FLIPPER REMOTE.** It is able to be programmed to work with a cable box, as some others are not. You may require assistance from your OT to help you with programming www.flipperremote.com

Using the Computer

- Make a visual memory aid that lists the sequence of steps for using the computer to check email or to look up a favorite website.
- Write out each step clearly, in as simple wording as is possible to convey instruction.
- Minimize clutter of icons on screen. Set up outlook or similar program for ease to accessing email.
- Create a shortcut on the main screen for your email account and favorite websites.
- Place sticky notes on the side of the main screen with reminders for how to solve problems that may occur frequently.

Strategies for Writing

Some Tips for maximizing legibility and comprehension with writing:

- Always Print!
- Write larger and use mostly capitals. Some letters in small case are less easy to differentiate, like letter “a” or “l” whereas sometimes it’s easier to use lower case, such as the letter “i”
- Try to write very short, simple commands when writing out directions and sequencing cards, such as “press red button, choose time, press start”
- Use larger paper or calendar so there is plenty of room to differential items and be able to print bigger.
- Use dark pen on lighter paper for optimal contrast.

Short Term Memory

➤ **GENERAL STRATEGIES FOR REMEMBERING IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

- Use the “WRAP” strategy to help you recall the information
Write it, Repeat it, Associate it, Picture it

➤ **WRITE IT DOWN**

- Use a notebook, preferably or 3 ring binder
- Date all entries
- Try to consolidate and have 1-2 notebooks
- It needs to be in a place where you will frequently look
- Carry a small notebook in your pocket or purse. Write down the date and any important information from that day: appointments you schedule, information from telephone conversations, recommendations from a doctor’s appointment. Tear out the pages when you no longer need the information.
- Never assume that you will remember something at a later time. Immediately write the information down. If it is a task, such as paying a bill or making a phone call, do it while you are thinking of it. Otherwise, write a large note to remind yourself to complete the task at a later time.
- Written reminders: post up reminders in places you will frequently look, such as the bathroom mirror, front door or refrigerator. Try using post-it notes or brightly colored paper to catch your attention. Use a black marker (sharpie) to easily read the information from far way.
- Have a list of important people and their phone numbers next to each phone

➤ **MEMORY CARD**

- A pocket sized card with your basic information to carry as a “back-up plan.” If you can’t remember the information, you can quickly look it up on your card.
- The card should include address, cell phone number and 1-3 names and numbers of family members, friends or doctors.

- The idea is to always have this tool with you in case you are unable to remember the information.
- Use at home and in the community

➤ MISPLACING OBJECTS

- Organize your belongings; reduce clutter by throwing away old mail and magazines.
- Pick a designated spot for items that you frequently misplace.
- Label each spot with a written reminder (example: “keys go here”).
- Place a bowl or dish on a table near the front door. Always place keys and other important items like your wallet, cell phone, and sunglasses in this bowl when you walk in the door.
- Use an eye glass chain.
- Buy an object locator device that will help you to locate objects, simply by pressing a button: http://assistivetech.net/search/productDisplay.php?product_id=51516
- Use a lanyard in your purse or a wallet chain to connect your wallet to your keys
- Use a necklace lanyard for small cellphone if needed; choose a place in your bag or purse for most important items. Always place them there.
- Use a small zip colored pouch to separate and organize items in your bag or purse (i.e. lipstick in red, bus pass in blue).

Helpful Apps for Memory (iPad/iPhone)

DAY ONE (\$5) – Daily journal that incorporates pictures with descriptions. Automatically tells the location and the weather at the time of the entry. Excellent tool to help with short term episodic memory loss. Can facilitate recall of recent events and conversations

MEMORY MANAGER (Free) – Creates guides with steps to complete particular tasks to help with ADL sequencing. Create reminders linked with titles, audio messages, pictures and alerts.

QUIZLET (Free) – Creates home program for practicing recall of important personal facts. This app allows pictures to be attached to the cards.

FLIPCARDS PRO (\$5) – Creates home program for practicing recall of important personal facts. This app allows pictures to be attached to the cards.

MEMORY GARDEN (Free) – Creates an online memory book. You can enter pictures with captions and record personal stories.

SPACED RETRIEVAL TRAINING (\$10) – Helps user to correctly measure intervals during spaced retrieval tasks. Allows user to set interval times and prompts user to ask the targeted question at the correct intervals of time.

Additional Resources

Rehabilitation Driving Evaluations: These are some local hospitals that run driving evaluation programs that help evaluation whether driving is still safe for an individual. A doctor's prescription is needed and all the testing and treatment is provided by Occupational Therapists. They do bill insurance, but often the actual drivers test is self-pay.

- Loyola University Medical Center, Maywood 708-216-9000
- Marionjoy Rehabilitation Hospital, Wheaton 630-909-8003
- Rush University Medical Center Driving Rehab Program, Chicago 312-563-2454
- Northshore University Health Program, Evanston 847-570-1260
- Advocate Christ Hospital, Oak Lawn 708-684-5425

TV Remotes

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GPS devices for items and people

There is an ever changing array of devices available that can help with locating lost items or location of a person. The technology has been changing rapidly. These are a few devices that may be helpful:

- **TILE:** This is a sensor that connects to a smart phone that can help with locating an item, such as a purse or keys. It is a small plastic tile that connects to the item and can be detected if the phone it is programmed to is near. www.thetileapp.com
- **Shoe GPS Devices:** There are currently multiple companies with this technology, so you can search online for the latest updates. Some popular devices include:
 - **GPS SMART SOLE-** this is an insert or GPS shoe in which the shoe itself is the device. This one requires plugging the shoe in for over 48 hours. www.smartsole.com
- **Smart Phone GPS:** Most smart phones now have the ability to be tracked via GPS with an app, such as "Find my iPhone." This can be helpful for finding misplaced cell phones.
- **Find my friend app:** This is an application that allows someone else to track another person using smart phones. This is most helpful for more mobile people, who are out and about alone, but want some protection just in case they get turned around. This relies on people having smart phones with them consistency, so it would not be as helpful for someone who does not often have a smart phone with them or misplaces the phone often.
- **Personal Tracking Systems currently available:**
 - **Project Lifesaver**
 - **Mindme**
 - **Safe Link**
 - **PocketFinder**
 - **Revolutionary Tracker**
 - **Comfort Zone Check-In**
 - **Bluewater Security**
 - **MedicAlert Safely Home**

Each has a slightly different functionality and all are available through www.alzheimers.net. Also, many great devices and products are available through Alzstore.com or www.alz.org

Time Management

Most people benefit from having a digital clock with the date and day of the week on it to help with orientation and time management. **A great option is called DAY CLOX.** DAY CLOX is expensive, but check out the link and it will give you an idea of what to shop for, as these are getting more popular and multiple ones are available on Amazon.com or in local stores. www.dayclox.com

Routine

We recommend following a typical daily routine with the same sequence of tasks. An example for morning task: use toilet, brush teeth, comb hair and then get dressed. Having items in view will help. The idea is that each next step of the sequence does not take as much problem solving and recall for initiation. We tend to do things on “auto pilot” if we are used to what’s next. Keep it as simple as possible

