



Dr. Kathleen A. Begley
The Write Woman
KBegley@writecompanyplus.com
610-429-1562

How to Cope with a Bad Memory

By Dr. Kathleen Begley
Professional Speaker and Author

Note to Readers: *This free e-newsletter, sent only upon request, comes from Dr. Kathleen Begley, owner of Write Company Plus communications training. She writes weekly on topics connected to business and personal success. Dr. Begley recently launched a new blog called "Meandering to a Different Drummer." Click onto the website address at the end of this article to read her one-paragraph musings on life, death, and how to keep a neat wallet.*

Brain tumor. Alzheimer's Disease. Premature senility. Six months ago, I was certain I had one, and probably all. My self-diagnosis came on the heels of several disturbing incidents over the summer involving my memory, or loss thereof. One afternoon in June, I walked into my home office in suburban Philadelphia, and then couldn't remember what I was looking for in my desk. A few weeks later, I rushed into the supermarket to pick up something in the dairy case, but quickly became clueless whether I wanted milk or cheese. In August, I called a life-long friend, but went totally blank the second she picked up the phone – who the heck had I just dialed?

For whatever reason, I had no problems in business – thank heaven. Nevertheless, despite my memory loss's impact only on my personal life, I was alarmed. How on earth could this be happening to me, a woman who in high school had been only few points away from a National Merit Scholarship? When I went onto the Internet to determine how much time I had left to play with a semi-full mental deck, I felt worse.

After searching Web MD and similar health-care Websites, I was certain I had not one but six or maybe seven brain tumors; I was in the absolute final stages of Alzheimer's; I soon would be unable to recognize my loved ones due to advanced senility. My beloved sister kept telling me all summer that I was forgetting things because of a super-busy life involving lots of business travel. At least that's what I vaguely recall her saying.

Early in the fall, or was it winter, I decided to take a bizarre step: see my family doctor. After offering the same stress excuse as my sister, my physician gently noted that I might feel better if I had an MRI of my brain. Oh heaven, I thought, the doctor knows I'm dying of cancer, but is afraid to tell me. With much trepidation, I trotted off to a local hospital to have my head examined or, as the professionals say, magnetically something or other.

The good news was that my brain was still in my head, and showed no signs of malignancy. The bad news was that there was still no explanation for my memory loss. So my doctor, obviously still hiding the truth from me, then recommended that I see a neurologist. Oh Lord, I thought, she knows for sure I have Alzheimer's, probably complicated by senility, though I couldn't remember the difference.

But that didn't seem to be the case, either. Although Alzheimer's is notoriously tricky to diagnose, because the physical signs don't show up on X-rays, the neurologist seemed to think I was free of that particular ailment. The reason appeared to be the fact that I found my nose OK with my eyes closed. I think I also impressed the heck out of him with my ability to turn my toes upward. What can I say? The guy's is really easy to please.

After the neurologist had asked me to count backward by sevens from 100, he suggested I get a blood test. I did so on the way out of his office, where a diagnostic laboratory happens to be



Dr. Kathleen A. Begley
The Write Woman
KBegley@writecompanyplus.com
610-429-1562

located. Well, lo and behold, the results showed I have a B-12 deficiency, which often manifests itself as memory loss. The doctor said I need to get weekly vitamin injections. Imagine my relief.

As a baby boomer, I happen to know that millions of Americans share my concerns about memory losses. A Website called www.healthcentral.com reports that many middle-aged individuals refuse to even participate in Alzheimer's studies because of fears by association. If you happen to be or know someone in this category, here are a few things I've learned during the past few months that may help you cope:

Avoid the Internet. If you type "brain tumor" into your search engine, it's not going to spit out articles about the joys of midlife sex. Keep your cool by keeping your fingers off your computer keyboard

See your doctor. I know this advice sounds drastic, but take it anyway. Your family and friends are ill equipped to explain why you have lost your capacity to spout answers during Jeopardy before host Alex Trebek has finished asking the question.

Relax. Some memory loss is normal as you age. And that can be a good thing. After all, who wants to remember that high school crush that routinely ignored you? Instead of obsessing, take a peaceful a bubble bath in the lavender-scented oil your cousin got you for your birthday last January -- if you can find it, that is.

Identify your biggest issues. One of my recurring problems is forgetting where I parked outside my local shopping mall. During the fall, I decided to memorize the store letter above my car, as in "S" as in Sears. The system worked fine until one crisp day when I forgot that I had driven my husband's sports utility vehicle instead of my sedan. I spent an hour searching for the wrong vehicle.

Write everything down. If needed information is on paper or on the computer screen, you'll be less likely to blank out when your spouse asks you whether you fed your pets. Your furry friends certainly aren't going to tell you the truth if lying gets them an extra meal.

Share your concerns. My sister always seems to know how to handle my medical concerns. Little wonder. She's an accountant with a license to practice her exquisite listening skills.

Tap into your sense of humor. Ever since I realized I'm not in imminent danger of losing my so-called mind, I've begun to chuckle about my occasional memory loss. In some respects, I'll probably miss my mental lapses once the B-12 kicks in. By the way, would you do me a favor and email me what this column is about?

Dr. Kathleen Begley has written seven books and gives corporate seminars on topics such as writing persuasively, presenting confidently, and managing positively. You can call her at 610-429-1562 or e-mail her at KBegley@writecompanyplus.com. She responds to everybody.