

# IS IT COGNITIVE DECLINE, OR SOMETHING ELSE?

*Even the most esteemed neurology experts can struggle to evaluate the memory capabilities of typical people. But some useful data points can help.*

**Cognitive impairment jumps sharply** among older adults—but not until they reach their ninth decade: Roughly one-quarter of people between the ages of 80 and 84 experience mild cognitive impairment. Even then, the remaining 75 percent show healthy cognitive abilities.

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**High performers and highly educated people** will often test within the normal range on memory evaluations, even if they're experiencing cognitive decline.

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**Conditions that demand prefrontal-cortex resources**, such as managing a stutter or Tourette's syndrome, can make a person stumble over words and falsely present as memory issues.

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**Tricks people use to avoid forgetfulness include** setting up appointments so that the other person calls them; agreeing to "reconfirm the day of"; and declining some meetings or tasks.

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**Romantic partners will often compensate** for each other. "Off-loading" memory tasks to the other partner can enable high functioning for long periods of time.