

Smartphone reminders can improve memory for older adults with dementia

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Older adults with dementia or mild cognitive impairment sometimes struggle to remember daily tasks, including managing medications, shopping for groceries and tracking upcoming events, including

birthdays, anniversaries or doctor appointments.

In a recent study involving researchers at the University of Missouri and Baylor University, [older adults](#) with dementia or mild cognitive impairment were able to improve their memory by using a personal assistant application on their smartphones to receive reminders about upcoming events and activities.

Andrew Kiselica is an assistant professor in the MU School of Health Professions. He collaborated with principal investigators Michael Scullin of Baylor University and Jared Benge of University of Texas—Austin, to study older adults with dementia or [mild cognitive impairment](#) and track how they performed with various memory tasks for four weeks. The study participants were instructed to take photos at certain locations or to make phone calls on certain days.

The researchers trained the older adults on how to use a personal assistant application on their smartphones, similar to Siri, to provide reminders for these tasks, as well as other daily events or activities they may struggle to remember.

"We were successfully able to train the adults to use the technology, and also the adults that used the personal assistants the most had the best memory performance," Kiselica said. "Some people may have had doubts about if we could train these older adults with cognitive impairment to use the technology or if they would find it helpful, and the preliminary evidence suggests it helped them with their memory and improved their quality of life."

Kiselica explained the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in technology use among older adults, and he is interested in evaluating if memory can be improved by technology-based interventions.

"One interest area of my research is figuring out how do we best diagnose people with cognitive impairment conditions as early as possible," Kiselica said. "Then, once they receive the diagnosis, how can we help them manage their condition so they can live their best life possible, and this is one solution that seemed to work well."

Both of Kiselica's grandfathers developed dementia, and while going through neuropsychology training in graduate school, he saw his mother's father become unable to walk or speak due to severe dementia.

"I am passionate about helping others that might be going through similar difficulties," Kiselica said. "If we can encourage the use of technology-based strategies in older adults with thinking issues, they may have better memory performance over the long term."

"Using smartphone technology to improve prospective [memory](#) functioning: A randomized controlled trial" was recently published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*.

More information: Michael K. Scullin et al, Using smartphone technology to improve prospective memory functioning: A randomized controlled trial, *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (2021). [DOI: 10.1111/jgs.17551](https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.17551)

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