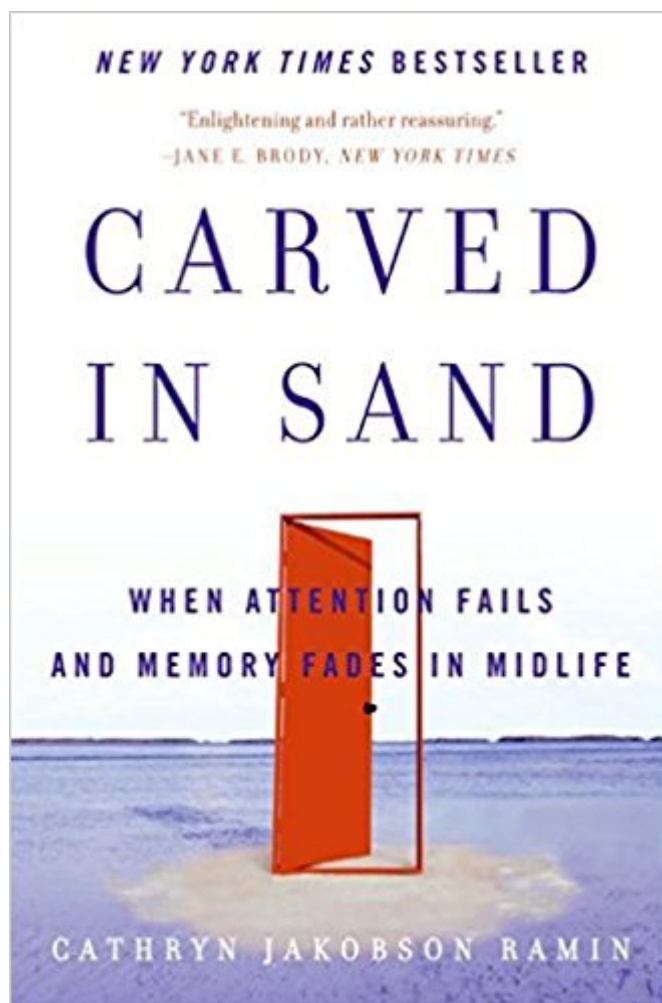


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# Carved In Sand: When Attention Fails And Memory Fades In Midlife



## Synopsis

Why can't you remember where you put your keys? Or the title of the movie you saw last week? Anyone older than forty knows that forgetfulness can be unnerving, frustrating, and sometimes terrifying. With compassion and humor, acclaimed journalist Cathryn Jakobson Ramin explores the factors that determine how well or poorly one's brain will age. She takes readers along on her lively journey—consulting with experts in the fields of sleep, stress, traumatic brain injury, hormones, genetics, and dementia, as well as specialists in nutrition, cognitive psychology, and the burgeoning field of drug-based cognitive enhancement. Along the way, she turns up fresh scientific findings, explores the dark regions of the human brain, and hears the intimate confessions of high-functioning midlife adults who—like so many of us—are desperate to understand exactly what's going on upstairs.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Memory loss and other cognitive problems are increasingly the bugaboo of aging baby boomers, as well as many of their elders. In her first book, veteran journalist Ramin turns herself into a guinea pig as she seeks ways to restore her own failing memory and growing inability to concentrate. Looking at a wide variety of genetic, biochemical and environmental factors that slow the connections among the brain's 100 billion neurons, especially in the hippocampus, Ramin undertakes 10 interventions, methods of achieving her cognitive enhancement. She logs the ups and downs of medications such as Adderall and Provigil; she looks at dietary supplements and biofeedback. She ends with discussions with experts, such as Nobelist Eric Kandel, about what keeps some people mentally

young into old age; the key seems to be having the "mental reserves" gained from challenging one's mind with new kinds of learning—such as learning a new language or studying art—that use different parts of the brain; the right diet and exercise also help. Overall, the variety of perspectives and the wealth of scientific information Ramin provides, as well as her warm personal style, will reward readers and may well help them stay mentally sharp. (Apr. 1) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Sometime after her fortieth birthday, journalist Ramin, who counts on her wits and recall, began forgetting the names of people and common objects. She was also having difficulty focusing for longer than it took to look up a synonym for the word whatchamacallit. She was so distressed that her first reaction was to conceal her handicap. She discovered, however, that many friends and associates, all about her age, were suffering the same symptoms and also trying to keep them secret. For the good of others in the same boat, she decided to throw herself on the sword, admit her incapacity, and offer herself as guinea pig as well as reporter to research midlife cognitive breakdown and the interventions available to ameliorate it. Her meaty memoir and science report reveals that there are nearly as many reasons for midlife memory loss (forgetfulness doesn't always presage Alzheimer's) as there are people who suffer from it, and that there are several tests to determine specific causes in addition to numerous resources to correct the root problem. Donna ChavezCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

On the positive side that book covers nearly all the causes of memory loss. These include anxiety, depression, genetic factors, stress, lack of exercise, lack of use of the intellect, sleep problems and poor diet among others. In addition, as the book is written by a journalist, it is fairly well written. It flows smoothly and is written in a fashion that all laymen can understand. On the negative side, each of the causes of memory loss are covered in a very superficial manner. Each one is covered in only short chapters of about 3-5 pages. Considering this length it is impossible to get an idea of the many alternative theories behind each of these causes and their strengths and weaknesses. One usually gets one theory or stated explanation with no alternatives and no discussion of weaknesses and strengths of the discussed explanation. Considering the fact that there are many theories and potential explanation behind each cause this is great disservice. In addition, and very importantly, the author is only a journalist with a non-technical background. An individual with the relevant

technical background (i.e., say in the neurosciences) would have provided a much better explanation of the posited causes of memory loss as well as strengths and weaknesses of the competing prevalent theories.

As a newly minted 48 year old man, I had my concerns. A little too much of my time these days was spent obsessing over "why couldn't I remember that?" and "Why is it so hard for me to learn this new thing?" I then coupled those feelings with "Oh my, am I slipping? Is there something very wrong with me?". This book really helped. The first thing it did was to reassure me that what I was going through was completely normal. Then it went through a very unscientific journey on how to deal with it. It was a wonderfully practical approach. Long story short, there are very real and very unavoidable cognitive challenges ~everyone~ will go through in mid-life. However, there are things that we can do to make the most of what we have. This book will help you get there. One other note, there are ~tons~ of books on "How to sharpen your mind" and "How to remember everything." This is not one of those books. This book will not tell you exactly what you need to do to bring your brain back to the place it was when you were 25. That's just not possible. However, this book reassures you and gives you a toolbox to work with what you have. That was really refreshing for me.

Sometimes I don't remember where I put my keys, not realizing I am holding them in my hands. I am sure this happened (or will happen) to all of us. This book will help you understand why this happens. This book explores the dark regions of the human brain, and will make you understand exactly what's going on in the brain from the perspectives of physiology, psychology, and sociology. This book is a must for everyone over 40 years old, who know just how unnerving, frustrating, and terrifying forgetfulness is. Do you wonder sometimes why you keep repeating yourself, saying the same thing over and over again in a conversation with someone? The author does a great job exploring the factors that determine how well--or poorly--one's brain will age. Did President Clinton lie when he said he forgot many of the events during his sex scandal trial? According to the author, Clinton is only human, and like all of us past mid-life, are prone to forgetfulness. Saying 'I forgot' or 'I can't remember' does not mean the person is lying. We sometimes forget where we put something we are holding in our hand! The chapter on Alzheimer was very fascinating. According to the author, even if Alzheimer is a genetic disease, genes are written in pencil, and we have the eraser. There are cases where one of twin siblings gets Alzheimer, while the other does not. In the US, 4.5 million people have Alzheimer. President Reagan had Alzheimer. According to the author, it has cost the US 91 billion so far to treat people with Alzheimer. So what can one do to protect

himself against Alzheimer? According to the author, you must exercise your brain, just like you exercise your abs. A friend of mine, who is a major manager at one of the biggest banks in the world, told me that she found her memory improving since she started playing Sudoku! She can calculate better and more complex problems in her mind, and can remember people and appointments without having to refer to her rolodex or secretary. Most of us go to the gym to exercise our muscles and for endurance training, but how many of us do training that focuses on our brain? Maybe soon in the future there will be gyms targeted at brain exercises. In fact, the author says such a gym already exists: The world is the real brain gym. Research has shown that social people, as opposed to private people who live a secluded life, are less prone to Alzheimer. Being social; going out and meeting people actually do the brain good. Absence of human interaction is dangerous to the brain. And this does not mean electronic interaction, such as web chatting. Facial expression helps in human communication and in memory retention. Through electronic socializing, facial expression is absent. Furthermore, staying indoors and inhaling CO<sub>2</sub> (plenty of it in homes) destroys brain cells. Try to stay outdoors as much as possible. Our homes should be a place we retire to in order to eat and sleep. And try to keep the windows open as much as possible. Interestingly, research has shown that testosterone helps against Alzheimer. Furthermore, sportsmen are more at risk of getting Alzheimer (knocking their head, head injuries etc.). Mohammad Ali, the famous boxer, has Alzheimer; just count the times he was knocked on his head! There are many programs available to improve one's memory. Puzzles and riddles offer great exercises to our brain, and many can be found in books and board games. Some internet websites also offer great puzzles and games for brain training. I once read a book about improving one's memory that stressed on the technique of visualizing images with colors, or objects with images. I once used this technique, and for years was able to memorize a list of items! Not because our brain is in the inside, and unseen by the eye, we should neglect it. Like our muscles and abs, our brain too needs its own share of training! According to the author, women have generally better memory than men. I found this to be fascinating. According to her, thousands (or maybe millions?) of years ago, while men were out hunting, women picked between poisonous fruits, and thus had to have a very sharp memory. Many fruits look the same, and eating the wrong one could lead to death. Women therefore evolved with a better memory. Just like we eat healthy foods to maintain a healthy body (mostly for outside appearance, like flat abs), we must also eat foods that are good for our brain. Glucose is the fuel of our brain, and not getting enough spells trouble. Vitamin supplements might be good, but too much is not good. The author recommends we get our vitamins from natural foods, such as fruits. Next time you crave sugar, don't go to your chocolate drawer; rather, eat fruits

or honey. Honey and dates are excellent sources of sugar. Be aware that diabetes has been linked to memory loss. Fish oil, though great for the body and mind, might have mercury. Mercury is poisonous; it does not belong in the human body. In some tuna cans, the mercury level was double the FDA limit. Mercury destroys brain cells! Mercury has also been found in fish oil supplements. Contrary to popular opinion, depression does not cause memory loss. But lack of sleep does. In our fast moving society, we are getting less sleep, which directly leads to memory loss. A rested body is a healthy brain. The author dedicates a whole chapter on exploring drugs aimed at improving memory. I found that chapter fascinating. There are many serious side effects to many of the drugs, but some of them accomplish wonders. You must be really well informed and do your own research before taking such drugs. Remember, doctors are not gods! They sometimes make mistakes, and they don't necessarily know everything. In small amounts, alcohol can protect you against Alzheimer and heart disease. In large quantities it produces memory loss. It seems that the harmful effects of alcohol consumption outweigh its benefits. Want to know what really affects your memory? Hard Drugs, such as cocaine, destroy brain cells. Air pollution, pesticides, and home sprays also affect our memory. Many medicinal drugs also have an effect on our memory. Chemotherapy makes the brain 25 years older. But what tops my list, and you definitely did not guess it: Sexual orgasms! According to the author, some powerful orgasms constrict veins in the brain and cause memory loss forever that is just before the orgasm and right after. The unlucky ones can experience six months of memory loss. This condition affects 25 in 100,000 people. One should aim for a moderate orgasm. To be moderate in everything is good. Do you want to know whether you will have Alzheimer by genetic testing? Genetic testing makes it now possible to know whether you will end up with Alzheimer 9 to 15 years in advance. What if your genetic testing proves positive? Do you want to live the next 15 years dreading the fact that you will have Alzheimer? This is really a fascinating book and I am glad I read it. It will make you start looking from the inside out in your health program.

The middle ground between memory loss (related to normal aging) and Dementia is the diagnosis of Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI). This is the only book I have found entirely devoted to MCI. Unless you have MCI, or you know someone has MCI or Dementia, you cannot speak intelligently about cognitive problems (the ones NOT associated with the normal aging process) unless you read this book. The author pursued many options to improve her cognitive functioning and documented them all. She found out she did not have AZ, and she did improve her memory using several of the options. I too have MCI. In addition to taking the medication Namenda (recommended for memory

problems associated with Post-traumatic Stress Syndrome), I have had to use oxygen, alpha-lipoic-acid and other supplements reviewed by the author to maximize my brain's performance. I did extensive research on the internet, but before trying anything, I read "Carved in Sand" as a second source for the remedies I found most recommended on the internet posts. This is an Excellent Book by someone who deals with MCI.

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