



# The Curious Case of Mommy Brain

Is it just a case of being too busy, or does having kids really drain your brain? Katy moms share their real-life mom-nesia moments.

*Written by Susanna Donald*

It seems cosmically wrong. Just when you need your mind at its sharpest - when someone's life literally depends on you - you put your car keys in the freezer. Or you pack your black-bean hummus wrap in your son's lunchbox and find his PB&J in yours. You squint through a thick fog of sleep deprivation and hormones only to realize (halfway through the day) that you actually wore two different shoes to work. The stories are so common and wide-ranging that this phenomenon, common during pregnancy and the post-partum period, is typically dubbed "mommy brain."

## **The Science of Mommy Brain**

Many women experience periods of uncharacteristic absentmindedness during and after pregnancy, at least according to a large body of anecdotal evidence. This evidence was strong enough to inspire scientists to research whether or not new moms actually lose brainpower, and the results were surprising. Research published by the American Psychological Association discovered that parts of the brain actually grow larger within months of having a baby, indicating that mommy brain is - strangely enough - all in

your head. Multiple studies have shown that the neurons in a mother's brain actually reorganize themselves, re-wiring the mom to be more empathetic and more intuitively connected with her baby and his or her needs.

Still, the perfect postpartum storm of extreme sleep deprivation, intense multitasking, wildly fluctuating hormones, and stress must have some effect on a mom's brainpower. Dr. Erin Beltramini, a physician at Premier OBGYN of West Houston and mother of two young sons, knows a few things about the mommy brain phenomenon. "Women are great multitaskers and often do the best job of managing the demands of being a mother and sometimes partial (or even primary) breadwinner," notes Dr. Beltramini. "Mommy brain" may not be a medically recognized condition, but any mom can attest to its reality. The more kids or job demands (or both), the worse it can become."

Dr. Beltramini adds that there are many different things that may contribute to mommy brain. "Exhaustion brought on by multiple nighttime awakenings, anxiety from juggling the needs of children, household chores, and job responsibilities, lack of exercise, and poor diet are all underlying causes," she says. Additionally, chemical changes can manifest in more dangerous ways. Moms who are feeling unusually overwhelmed and sad or who are crying excessively for no apparent reason should speak with their OBGYN immediately about postpartum depression.

### Fighting the Fog

Even in the deepest cloudiness of motherhood, there are still a few things you can do to fight for more clarity. "The biggest way any mom can combat mommy brain is to give yourself a

break," says Dr. Beltramini. Obviously, it's nearly impossible to get a full night of sleep when you have a newborn, or older children for that matter, but having a spouse or family member take over for a few middle-of-the-night feedings and diaper changes can help you snag some extra Zs. Getting help with household chores or taking care of older siblings can also provide mom a chance to rest.

Make sure you're fueling your overworked, overtired body with good nutrition as well. Fresh fruits and vegetables boost your antioxidants while healthy Omega-3 fats feed your brain. You'll also feel more energized with better nutrition and adequate hydration.

Exercise, even if it's just a brisk walk around the block with the stroller, will help you reduce stress and bring clarity. "Even a 30-minute walk can help clear your mind," says Dr. Beltramini. See if another mom wants to come along - fostering an interpersonal connection between you and another adult will also work wonders inside your brain.

Writing things down in lists or on calendars can also help you stay organized, provided you can find your list, or your calendar, or even a pen for that matter. Just keep in mind that even the listiest mommy can forget an early dismissal day or two. Give yourself some grace and try to laugh at the lapses that will inevitably come. Then, hug your kids and remember the only thing really worth remembering: they are worth it. KM



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## Katy Moms Share Mommy Brain Moments

The upside to having a bigger brain that seems, somehow, to work less efficiently, is that you aren't alone. Moms around the world are sprinkling flour on French toast, or getting their kids ready for school in the middle of the summer, or wondering where the heck their cell phones are, only to discover that they are safely clutched in their hands. Here are a few classic mommy brain moments shared by our readers.



"I have a toddler and a newborn. I went to the gym one day and came home to discover that my wallet was not inside my gym bag. I went back to the gym to look for it, even enlisting some staff members to help me. Back at home, I dumped everything out of my gym bag - twice. No wallet. I went back to register a lost/possibly stolen item complaint at the gym, and, on my way home, while fishing crackers out of my gym bag for my son, I found...my wallet. It was in the bag the whole time." - Shannon R.



"I ran into our garage door (with the car) not once but twice in one month. The garage door would be open and as I started backing out, I'd inexplicably push the garage door button, and I would back right into it as it came down. We had to get two brand new garage doors." - Natasha M.

"When my kids were little, I accidentally threw out two bags full of Christmas presents. I had to replace everything before Christmas morning." - Jeanette M.



"I thought my cute new Christmas napkins said 'Happy Holidays.' At Christmas dinner my kids asked, 'Mom, what's up with the St. Patrick's Day napkins?'" - Vicki G.



"While pregnant with my second child, I left my keys dangling from the lock of my trunk for almost two hours while I shopped. I did not even realize that I didn't have my keys with me until I walked up to my vehicle and saw them. So surprised my car was still there!" - Jesse M.