

Healthy Brain Classes Teach Awareness, Association Tips to Improve Memory

“As we get older, we try to do the right things to keep ourselves in shape,” says Shirley Jimmerson. The 81-yearold Fort Myers resident exercises regularly and has been a member of the Lee Memorial Health System’s Wellness Center of Cape Coral since it opened. So when Lee Memorial Health System announced its Healthy Brain Initiative memory classes, it was only natural for her to join up and exercise her mind, too.

“I had kind of slipped into some bad memory habits,” Ms. Jimmerson says. “Everyone develops some lazy memory habits over time, but the classes taught me some tools and tips to help me remember things better.”

The Healthy Brain Initiative was started by Lee Memorial Health System’s Lee Memory Care division to provide ways for residents of Southwest Florida to boost brainpower and fight the onset of memory disorders. It’s based on a program by the UCLA Center for Aging. Participants follow activities in “The Memory Bible: An Innovative Strategy for Keeping Your Brain Young,” a book by Gary Small, Ph.D., director of the UCLA Center.

However, Ms. Jimmerson feels people of all ages can benefit from the memory classes and computer-based modules. The class series begins by exploring individuals’ learning styles and as it progresses, participants are asked to share the techniques they used to remember information. Ms. Jimmerson says every person in her class had different methods for remembering, which she found interesting. She learned that simply being aware and paying more attention to people and things could help power her memory.

The computer-based modules are also self-paced and adjust to participants’ strengths and pace, so there’s no competition or comparing with others in the class.

“One of the other most helpful tips I learned was to associate numbers and letters when I’m trying to remember things like names or phone and license plate numbers,” Ms. Jimmerson says. “For example, if the first four digits of someone’s number are 224, I think, ‘two plus two equals four.’”

Some numbers also look like letters, and vice versa, so you can make a game out of remembering.”

While the system’s program is the only one of its kind in Southwest Florida, memory classes and spas are catching on across the country. Programs in seven states use “The Memory Bible,” including California, Texas, Illinois and Florida. Ms. Jimmerson says she’s noticed memory classes being advertised more and more in literature she receives from elder care programs up north.

Memory classes are starting up on various days all around Lee County. A six-week session of two-hour classes once per week costs \$90. For more information about the Healthy Brain Initiative or current class schedule, visit www.healthybrainfl.org or call the SHARE Club at 772-6765.