

Sorry, It's on the Tip of My Tongue

Several techniques can help you remember the name of the person you just met.



Forty seconds after you're introduced to your new neighbor, you're fumbling around in your brain for their name: Scott? Steve? Something that started with an S, you're sure. Forgetting someone's name leaves us and them feeling awkward. You're not alone, it's a common social faux pas at any age. As we get older, it may happen more often due to age related memory decline. However, there are techniques to help you remember names. Here are a few:

Pay attention. Often in social situations, we are looking around at other people, checking to see where the food and drinks are, or worrying about making a good first impression. The trick is to give the other person your full attention and truly be interested in them.

Comment on the name. You might say something about the name: "That's my brother's name" or "That's an unusual name. Where does it come from?" This creates an association you're more likely to remember. If it's a unique name or a common name with different spellings, ask: "Is that Kathy with a K or C?"

Repeat the name. If you didn't quite hear the name, you can ask the person to say it again. Similarly, during the conversation, repeat aloud the name: "So you're saying, Steve, that . . ." You can also replay it in your head. When the conversation is done, be sure to note their name again: "Nice meeting you, Steve."

Make up associations. Perhaps the person resembles a celebrity, so you can connect that person you just met with Matt Damon or Susan Sarandon. Or they may have a distinguishing feature, such as a birthmark or tattoo, which will help you remember their name. Along the same line, their first or last name may be similar to an object that you can link it to: Connect "Barry" to a strawberry or blueberry, as long as the next time you don't accidentally call him "Strawberry."

Write it down. As soon as possible, write down the person's name. After meeting your new neighbor, run home and grab a piece of paper.

Ask for help. At a social gathering, likely you have friends or acquaintances who know the person you just met. Discreetly ask them the person's name, if you forgot.

Ask again. If, during the conversation, you forget the person's name, don't be embarrassed to admit it. (They might be having the same problem.)