

Advice for Healthcare Memorization

(Nursing, MD, biology, etc.)

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There is a lot of memorization to get through anatomy & physiology (A&P), chemistry, microbiology, and other biological and healthcare foundation courses. Since I have struggled with memorization, I wanted to share my thoughts on how to remember stuff.

- Tell a story connecting ideas. A story is one of the oldest ways to remember a lot of stuff. Whether it's how the Krebs cycle works, or steps of digestion, or something else, seeing the big picture can help remember the context of smaller ideas. An emotional connection to the ideas makes much more powerful memories.
- Learn the common medical prefixes and suffixes. Most are from Latin or Greek. They can be helpful to dissect an unfamiliar word. These include the anatomical directions and reference lines. For example, the way to a man's heart is not through his stomach, but along the fourth intercostal space and left midclavicular line. Intercostal is between (inter) the ribs (costal) and the midclavicular line is the middle (mid) of the left clavicle bone. That, more specifically, is the location of the left ventricle of the heart and its mitral valve, the strongest place to hear a heartbeat.
- Anatomy was generally learned by dissecting corpses, so things were often described by what they look like or where they are. For example, the tibialis anterior muscle tells you where it is. It is in front of (anterior to) the tibia (tibialis). A layer of tissue between the brain and skull looks like a spider web, so it was called the arachnoid (spider-like) layer.
- Look for patterns. Does this topic follow a similar progression or similar math ideas as another topic? For instance, heat transfer and radioactive decay are both exponential decay processes. Control of vital signs is generally a negative feedback loop. For example, an elevated blood pressure will signal to reduce the heart rate, which should reduce the blood pressure.
- Look for simple ways to remember a series of events. Silly things, like the names of each thing might be in alphabetical order or spell out an acronym or mnemonic. Some of these are given to you, like taking a patient's history (SAMPLE), cranial nerve functions (Old Operators Occasionally Troubleshoot Tricky, Abducted Family Veterans Galloping Valiantly Across History), or how to use a fire extinguisher (PASS).
- I was raised by a linguist, so I use word traits to help keep them straight. I remember that a tornado WATCH is less serious than a tornado WARNING because WARNING has more letters in it! More letters mean more work to write it, so it must be more important.
- Use more than one sense to remember key concepts. Say them out loud. Write them down **by hand** (typing doesn't help). Heck, sing them if that helps!
- Ancient methods like making flash cards still work; or buy premade ones for key topics. Mix up the cards and set aside ones you have trouble remembering.
- Take pretests if you can. See which areas you already know well, and identify which ones need extra attention.

And most helpful if you can, join or make a study group. Quizzing each other can reinforce ideas orally, and you might be able to provide tips for classmates and vice versa. Explain concepts and processes to each other.