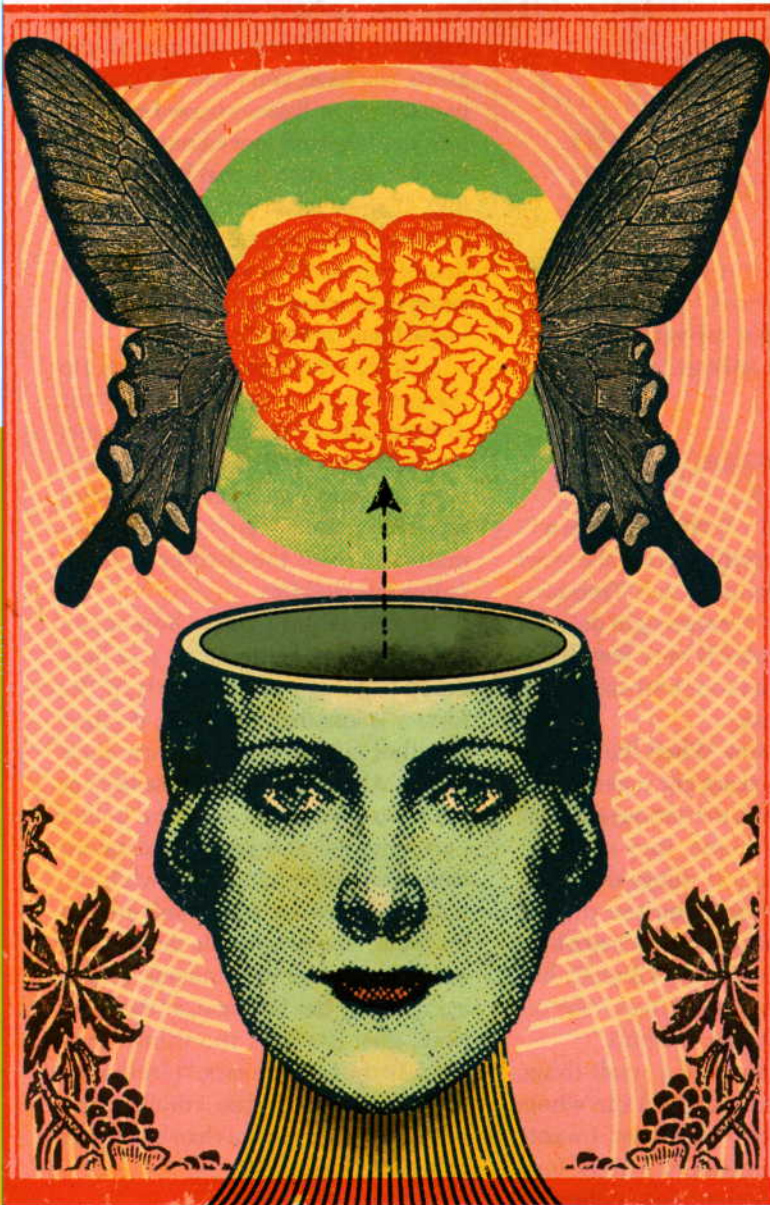




The blunder years

FEEL AS THOUGH YOUR BRAIN HAS TAKEN FLIGHT? HOW TO MANAGE THOSE MADDENING MISSING-MEMORY MOMENTS ON THE JOB



I

needed to contact her. I clearly remembered her face, voice and professional affiliation, but could not — no matter what mnemonic trick I tried — recall her name. Plowing in frustration through my email address book, I finally found her, way down in the R's.

I used to have a memory like a steel trap. Co-workers came to me for instant recall of forgotten facts. Now it seems that trap has rusted shut. But I'm not alone. According to Jerilynn Prior, a Vancouver-based menopause expert and a University of British Columbia professor of endocrinology and metabolism, those memory hiccups that routinely stalk busy people in fast-paced work environments begin to happen more often to women once they hit midlife.

Peachy timing, isn't it? No sooner do we reach our professional peak than our mental hard drive begins to unpredictably drop memory files into biochemical trash bins, forcing us to try and manage the glitches gracefully, while wondering what onlookers must be thinking.

Women's busy lives may not have changed by this point — in addition to job stress, we still take on the lion's share of domestic tasks — but we begin experiencing hormonal shifts during the decade or so of perimenopause that precedes actual menopause.

Stress triggers production of too much of an adrenal hormone in the brain called cortisol, which can cause intermittent memory failures. And, Prior says, "estrogen levels average higher in perimenopause, and that increases or amplifies the cortisol response to stresses in women's lives."

Increasing memory lapses can spark a new stress, adds Prior: We begin wondering if we're displaying signs of Alzheimer's or some other early-onset form of senile dementia. We're not, she says. It's normal to forget where we put our sunglasses or what that person's name is. Forgetting what sunglasses are used for, or who that person is, would indicate a

BY JUDY WAYTIUK

CHRISTIAN NORTHEAST

