

IS MY MEMORY AS GOOD AS AN ELEPHANT'S

Animation narrated by Rachel Riley featuring Professor Giuliana Mazzoni

RR: Imagine being able to remember what you wore on your first day at work, the weather on the day you started school... or what time it was the moment you learnt to ride a bike. Now imagine if you could remember these, and thousands of other events in your life, as if they happened minutes ago.

Incredible as it may seem, some people can; those with a rare psychological condition known as hyperthymesia – or Highly Superior Autobiographical Memory.

This massively enhances an aspect of our memory known as autobiographical memory, allowing the tiniest details of an abnormally large number of life experiences to be remembered perfectly. In the UK, Aurelian Hayman is one of the few people who have been identified as having the condition.

This has given specialists new insights into the inner workings of the human mind...

GM: His brain is wired differently than the average brain, so he has connections that we don't have, to that extent.

And we have also observed that when he tries to remember, you know when you said the date, I could picture actually what was happening in his brain and what he was activating was mainly the occipital areas, the visual areas, which light up immediately, and also some frontal areas that reveal that actually his memory, for his personal events, is mediated by visual experiences and they are represented as facts.

RR: A brain that remembers everything could make life a lot easier.

But then again, super memory may well be something that those with hyperthymesia would rather forget. It's been described as experiencing an unstoppable stream of memories that cannot be turned off and is "non-stop, uncontrollable and totally exhausting". In

fact, too much information can produce interference, which impairs memory.

So perhaps we should ponder on the thought that for most people, the ability to forget the unnecessary could be preferable to being able to remember everything.