

Reminder Redundancy: Making Up for Memory Issues



I carry a hardcover day planner around with me wherever I go. Its cover bears pink, red, and blue Parisian cartoons of the Eiffel Tower, baguettes, lip-stick prints, and poodles wearing red berets and striped sweaters.

My teenage son thinks this is crazy given that I also carry an iPhone and use a Google calendar, but then again, he's not someone with MS who will do anything she can to try to compensate for short-term memory issues (the fact that I also have a paper calendar hanging in my kitchen is, in this son's mind, the height of redundancy).

Speaking of my iPhone, I regularly use it to help me remember the items of which I must keep track. I make liberal use of the Google calendar function, even though I'm aware that I'm duplicating this effort in my French planner by inputting events and due dates in two places.

But that day planner cannot beep at me. It cannot play annoying reminder tunes or maintain the same level of documentation that my iPhone does. This device does everything but skywrite and send carrier pigeons to the house with messages about the things I need to remember. For example, twice a day, the phone dings to alert me to take my disease modifying therapy medication. If I don't manually swipe the alert away, it keeps pestering me. When it comes to reminding me about things like doctors' appointments, meetings, deadlines and upcoming birthdays, I've programmed the little bugger to be relentless. It will remind me — with a unique reminder sound — in varying time increments, ranging from

days, hours and minutes before I must take action on the event (like when I need to leave the house to drive someplace or buy greeting cards *and* mail them).

I make frequent use of the cellphone camera, and not to just to take and post online too many photos of my dogs, Max and Tedy, to the point where that same son who gives me a hard time about my dead-tree day planner says I'm coming off like a "crazy dog lady" on Instagram. That camera is yet another tool. It reminds me of where I parked the car, what ingredients go into a dish, and, when I use the screenshot function, of things I've seen that I might want to try or buy or attend.

Additionally, I'm fond of the phone's Notes function. It's where I keep lists of books, movies, and TV shows I'd like to read and watch, as well as chronicling my MS symptoms, and maintaining a miscellaneous, running to-do list.

But to be honest, nothing beats writing things down as a way to try to imprint these items into my MS-dinged brain, thus my insistence that I also put pen to paper.

This year I added a utilitarian, college-ruled spiral notebook to the mix. I write most of what I've done in any given day in it, including with whom I spoke to and about what. If I am the one doing the calling, I write down the phone number and the time I placed the call. I note what MS symptoms I experienced that day, jot them down in the day planner and also keep a running list on my phone. If I order something online, it goes into this notebook, along with what I read that day, and what movies or TV shows I watched.

On top of all of this, I still rely on vibrant, highlighter-colored sticky notes which I place in the active areas of my desk, like next to my laptop or even on the cover of the day planner. Sometimes I place them on the kitchen counter – a step or two away from that paper calendar on the wall – where I read my daily, dead-tree newspapers as my iPhone cheeps away with its reminders.

Does it seem ridiculous to my teenage son that his mother needs to be reminded in her paper day planner, on her paper kitchen calendar, on her noisy Google calendar, with her noisy iPhone reminders, and via her blindingly bright sticky notes on the kitchen counter that there's a doctor's appointment coming up? Absolutely. It's reminder madness. However, that son will come to realize all these reminders can prove beneficial to him when they don't let me forget his birthday. Or that he wants me to pick up bagels. Everything bagels. Plus, a brick of the cream cheese he likes. In those instances, the reminders won't seem so insane.