Overview
Prospective memory (PM) errors include failures to execute an intended task (e.g., forgetting to take medication), and mistakenly repeating a completed task (e.g., taking medication twice). In two studies, we tested whether emotional cues can help reduce older adults’ omission and repetition errors. We also assessed performance on an ongoing task to determine whether the benefits of emotional cues come at a cost.

Experiment 1
Older adults performed a lexical decision task (LDT) while also executing a PM task (pressing a key when a target word appeared). PM cues varied across four blocks of LDT trials: no PM cue (control), neutral cue, negative cue, and positive cue.

Participants
36 healthy, community-dwelling older adults (ages 55 – 88 yrs.)

Procedure
Ss given two target words/PM block (e.g., passion and cash; panic and killer; kettle and custom)
For all blocks, Ss then engaged in 4-minute distractor task
After 4-minute delay, block of 240 LDT trials began (no reminder of PM task)

Results
PM Performance
Negative cues > neutral cues
Positive cues > neutral cues
Negative cues = positive cues

Monitoring
All PM conditions > control
No RT differences across PM cue type

E1 Summary
• PM performance was better for emotional versus neutral cues
• This boost in PM with emotional cues was not associated with additional monitoring or disruption to the ongoing task

Experiment 2
Emotional cues reduce omission errors, but what about repetition errors? In E2 we assessed repetition errors for negative versus neutral cues in a habitual PM task.

Participants
24 healthy, community-dwelling older adults (ages 61-84 years)

Materials
There were 14 blocks of LDT trials. Each block included:
20 words (19 non-target; one PM target)
20 non-words (English Lexicon Project)
All stimuli appeared 3X/block for a total of 120 LDT trials/block.

Procedure
Ss first received instructions for lexical decision task
emphasis on speed of responding for LDT
If block contained PM targets, PM instructions given next
Ss told to press a key when target word appeared

Procedure (continued)
One PM target (negative or neutral) served as the PM cue for 7 blocks.
A second PM target (neutral or negative) served as the PM cue for the other 7 blocks.
In each block, the PM target appeared 3X
Participants were to respond once and only once per block
Participants strongly encouraged to respond to very first PM target in each block

Results
PM Hit Rate
High PM performance across both conditions. We were successful in creating equal opportunity for repetition errors across cue type.

Repetition Errors
Older adults made significantly fewer repetition errors with negative than with neutral cues.

Summary Across Experiments
• Emotional cues are more effective than neutral cues at prompting PM
• The boost in PM with emotional cues is not associated with additional monitoring during the ongoing task
• Repetition errors are reduced with emotional cues