Olvidar, Olvidarse de and Se me olvidó

The three expressions are olvidar, olvidarse de and se me olvidó. All three are correct in Spain, but they don't always feel the same in everyday conversation.

And there's one especially useful detail: in Valencia, you'll very often hear “se me ha olvidado”, particularly when someone has just realised they've forgotten something.

1. The three ways Spanish speakers express forgetting

Expression	Natural example	How it feels
Olvidar	He olvidado las llaves.	Correct, direct, a little more neutral or formal
Olvidarse de	Me he olvidado de las llaves.	Very natural and conversational
Olvidársele algo a alguien	Se me han olvidado las llaves.	Extremely common; focuses on the thing that slipped your mind

Notice that the last one doesn't follow the same structure as the other two. That's where the fun begins!

2. What would you actually say in Xàtiva?

Imagine you're leaving the house and realise your coffee is still sitting on the kitchen counter.

VERY NATURAL · EVERYDAY SPANISH

¡Me he dejado el café en casa!: This is probably what I'd choose if you physically left your coffee behind.

ALSO VERY NATURAL

¡Se me ha olvidado el café!: You forgot about the coffee, perhaps while rushing out.

CASUAL AND COMMON

¡Me he olvidado del café!: Another perfectly ordinary way to express it.

Here's a lovely distinction: in Spain, dejarse algo is especially useful for things you've accidentally left somewhere.

- Me he dejado el móvil en el coche.

- Me he dejado las gafas en casa.
- Me he dejado el bolso en el restaurante.

If you're talking about forgetting to drink your coffee rather than leaving it somewhere, you'd say Se me ha olvidado tomarme el café.

3. Why do people say “se me olvidó”?

This is a wonderful little Spanish construction. Se me ha olvidado el café.

Se = Part of the construction
me = The person affected
ha olvidado = The verb
el café = The grammatical subject

The thing forgotten is actually the grammatical subject, so the verb agrees with it:

- Se me ha olvidado el nombre.
- Se me han olvidado los nombres.
- Se me ha olvidado la cita.
- Se me han olvidado las llaves.

That singular/plural difference is important!

4. “Se me olvidó” versus “Se me ha olvidado”: Both are used in Spain, but there's a regional and contextual nuance. In much of Spain, including Valencia, the present perfect is especially natural when the forgotten thing matters right now.

For example: ¡Ay, se me ha olvidado llamar a María!

You're realising it now, and the call hasn't happened.

El otro día se me olvidó llamar a María.

You're recounting a completed incident from another day.

You will hear both forms in Valencia, and individual speakers vary. The distinction isn't a rigid rule, but it's a helpful guide.

5. “I forgot it” — what would a local say? It depends on what it is.

Situation	What I'd naturally say
Someone reminds you of something	¡Ay, se me había olvidado!
You suddenly remember something	¡Uy, se me ha olvidado por completo!
You forgot to bring something	¡Me lo he dejado en casa!
You forgot someone's name	¡Se me ha olvidado su nombre!

You forgot to do something	¡Se me ha olvidado hacerlo!
You forgot your coffee somewhere	¡Me he dejado el café!

And one very Spanish reaction: “¡Ay, es verdad! ¡Se me había olvidado!”

That's exactly the sort of phrase you'll hear when someone reminds a friend of a plan or commitment.

Basco's favourite takeaway 💙

If you want to sound natural around Xàtiva, get comfortable with these three patterns:

¡Se me ha olvidado! — Something slipped your mind.
¡Me he olvidado de…! — You forgot about something.
¡Me lo he dejado en casa! — You left something behind.

And here's a very useful local-sounding exchange:

— Oye, ¿has traído el café?

— ¡Ostras! ¡Me lo he dejado en casa! 😅

“¡Ostras!” is a very common, mild exclamation in Spain. It fits perfectly when you've forgotten something.

These are the kinds of expressions that make the difference between simply knowing Spanish grammar and actually living in Spanish.