

Brain Exercises and Dementia



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Can you help your brain stay healthy as you age by doing things that challenge your mind? Could that also help you avoid memory loss, or even prevent or delay [dementia](#) such as Alzheimer's?

Scientists need to do more research to find out for sure. But a number of studies show there are benefits to staying mentally active.

Here's what we know about the impact of exercising your brain.

Can brain exercises help delay memory loss or dementia?

When people keep their minds active, their thinking skills are less likely to decline, medical research shows. So games, puzzles, and other types of brain training may help slow [memory loss](#) and other mental problems.

One study involved more than 2,800 adults 65 and older. They went to up to 10 hour-long brain-training sessions for 5 to 6 weeks. The sessions focused on tactics for these skills:

- Memory
- Reasoning
- Speed of processing information

People who took the training showed improvement in these skills that lasted for at least 5 years. They also improved at everyday tasks, such as the ability to manage money and do housework.

But what about prevention of Alzheimer's and other dementias? Does brain training help?

One study found that exercising the mind delayed declines in thinking skills. After people started having [Alzheimer's symptoms](#), though, mental decline sped up in those who kept their minds engaged. It's possible that being mentally active bolstered the brain at first, so symptoms didn't show up until later.

The silver lining here? People who regularly challenge their minds may spend a shorter part of their lives in a state of decline, even if they do get Alzheimer's.

What kinds of brain exercises should I do?

That may vary from person to person. But the main idea seems to be keeping your brain active and challenged. You could start with something as simple as eating with the hand you usually don't use from time to time.

You can also:

- Learn something new, such as a second language or a musical instrument.

Social connections also help your brain.

- Work on crossword, number, or other kinds of puzzles.
- Play online memory games or video games.
- Read, write, or sign up for local adult education classes.

How does brain activity help?

Studies of animals show that keeping the mind active may:

- Reduce the amount of brain cell damage that happens with Alzheimer's
- Support the growth of new [nerve](#) cells
- Prompt nerve cells to send messages to each other

When you keep your brain active with exercises or other tasks, you may help build up a reserve supply of brain cells and links between them. You might even grow new brain cells. This may be one reason scientists have seen a link between Alzheimer's and lower levels of education.

Experts think the extra mental activity from education may protect the brain by strengthening connections between its cells.

Neither education nor [brain exercises](#) are a sure way to prevent Alzheimer's. But they may help delay symptoms and keep the mind working better for longer.

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