

MEMORY MOMENT

People often ask us "Is there any way to prevent dementia?" While there is a lot we still don't know about these diseases, research is developing ways to reduce the risk of dementia as well as many other chronic diseases. Over the next several months, this article series will focus on various strategies for better health. This month, we focus on brain stimulation or training!

Strengthen Your Brain to Reduce Your Risk of Dementia!

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Any form of dementia starts in the brain! Our brains are very complex organs that we need for life. The brain regulates every part of our bodily systems. The brain needs exercise, or stimulation, to work well and for us to live well even into our later years. Research is showing that keeping our brains healthy and strong can reduce our risk of dementia!

A Mayo Clinic study showed that taking part in stimulating brain activities showed three things:

1. The more activities that you do, the more your risk decreases.
2. It is never too late to start.
3. You don't need any fancy brain game gadgets.

According to a study that was presented at the Alzheimer's Association's International 2019 conference, even when signs of dementia are physically present, people who had the most measurable cognitive reserve – a learned ability to improvise and find an alternate way to get a job done – will fare better. Research has shown that even though there are physical markers (i.e., amyloid plaque, tau proteins, misfolded proteins, etc.) of Alzheimer's disease and other

dementia in the brain, there are no outward *symptoms* of these diseases. The conclusion was that when brain changes can't be avoided (as in aging or dementia), ongoing activity that challenges the brain may not only reduce dementia risk, but help people better compensate for or cope with dementia pathology.

So, what type of activities can you do to strengthen your brain and build up cognitive reserve? There are a lot of things you can do and all they require is time and effort.

Some of the best things you can do are to learn a new language, learn to play a new instrument, or learn a new hobby. You are expanding your skills and using your brain.

Other things to do:

Try using your non-dominant hand when eating, writing or brushing your teeth or hair. It may be difficult, but you are stretching your mind.

Break the routine in your life. Sit at the dinner table in a different place. Walk a different route, paying attention to the different things you see, hear, smell or touch! Use as many of your senses as possible.

Do volunteer work.

Try a different shampoo, soap, perfume, toothpaste, etc.

Read a dictionary and learn a new word each day and use it!

Visit new and different places. Using maps stimulates the brain and exercises the parietal lobes. Also, try drawing a map of your neighborhood.

Try Mindfulness Meditation. Mindfulness meditation is a mental training practice to slow down your thoughts, let go of negativity and calm your mind and body. Mindfulness means to direct all your attention and awareness in the present. For a guide to mindfulness meditation go to verywellmind.com to find more information.

Try some of the brain training games on the computer. Researchers think that playing some of these games can help your brain. But, if you are already spending a lot of time on the computer, this may not be for you.

Verywellmind.com has a list of different computer brain training websites and apps.

Doing crossword puzzles, sudoku or other types of puzzles can be good. If you have done this type of activity for a long time, shake it up a bit. Try harder ones or do different types.

Try as many of these ideas as you can. Make them a part of your everyday life. Mental exercise is as important as diet and physical exercise for keeping your body and brain strong!

Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness (EAAA) is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit organization founded to provide education and support to all families, caregivers, and people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia in Effingham County and the surrounding area. For more information about Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, check out the website at www.effinghamalz.org. If you are a caregiver & have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free to call Shannon Nosbisch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.