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Delaying Cognitive Decline: 6 Stimulating Activities for People with Dementia

Working as a registered nurse in geriatric nursing care for nearly 40 years, I've been implementing different strategies into my practice. Among my top priorities has been identifying and implementing activities for delaying cognitive decline. When I became a director of nursing care, I started incorporating them into our training sessions with nurses so that they could learn how to help seniors on their way to mental well-being. Now, I will gladly share these beneficial practices with you.

By: Nancy Mitchell | Posted: January 12, 2023

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Living with dementia, people are often stigmatized by mental decline and the perceived inability to do anything about it.

What if I told you that there are certain tried-and-tested stimulating activities to delay mental decline?

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Follow me in this article, and find out how to boost mental health in senior years, and encourage your patients, relatives, or friends with Alzheimer's disease or other dementias to try these six essential activities.

6 Scientifically Proven Activities to Delay Cognitive Decline in People with Dementia

1. Reading

A healthier brain with proven memory enhancements is one of the most valuable benefits of reading. This activity can stimulate cognitive skills, save memory, and can actually help to reduce decline in brain power, according to research. Studies demonstrate that people who participate regularly in activities that provide mental stimulation such as reading had a rate of cognitive

decline estimated at 15 per cent slower than those who did not.

It's beneficial to be familiar with the reading abilities during different stages of dementia to identify suitable material, as well as the appropriate time and the amount of reading. That's when a habit tracker may become handy to plan the times for reading and journal the progress.

2. Crossword puzzles

According to the research, crossword puzzle participation improves cognitive reserve and slows down accelerated memory decline by roughly 2.5 years.

You may find interactive brain-boosters at the dedicated page of the Alzheimer Society of Canada including games of word search, brain-challenging crosswords, sudokus, among others.

3. Art therapy

Supporting older adults with Alzheimer's, a guided therapeutic process that includes both a psychotherapy element and an art element may be a key method to helping people stay mentally sharp longer.

Our brains "love" arts and crafts. Based on scientific research, art therapy has been shown to help prevent rapid cognitive decline in the elderly with dementia. It's worthwhile to try the following art therapy techniques:

- Painting
- Music
- Dancing
- Knitting
- Photography

4. Cooking

Cooking is one of the activities for Alzheimer's patients that can spark memories and can ward off dementia. The research during brain-activating rehabilitation for elderly residents with dementia demonstrated how a cooking program can not only help them maintain their executive function but also decrease the symptoms of this disease.

5. Yoga

Yoga is a go-to activity when we talk about striving for better mental and physical health and reducing long-term decline in the cognitive function of people who live with dementia.

Age isn't a barrier to do yogic exercises. Here's a list of helpful tips, when it comes to yoga for seniors:

- Select an appropriate yoga type for a person with Alzheimer's
- Prepare the needed gear and clothes
- Create an atmospheric setting with pleasant scents
- Start slow with the beginner poses
- Do yoga together, as meaningful connections and peer support matter

6. Running and exercises

It’s never too late to start running (in moderation, of course): at 50 or even beyond. Success stories of 50+ aged runners demonstrate that.

As running and workouts protect aging brains from dementia progression (taking into account exercise dosage, mode, intensity, and duration), regular exercises in the fresh air are highly beneficial. Make sure you organize safe outings for a run or a simple workout, especially when you’re caring for older adults during COVID-19.

Final Word on Stimulating the Brain and Slowing Down Mental Decline

Stimulation of brain power and attenuation of cognitive impairment in Alzheimer’s patients can be successfully achieved with the six activities backed by science: reading, puzzles, art therapy, cooking, yoga, and physical exercises.

Additionally, consider some other good practices for improving seniors’ mental health. You might also want to take the MHFA Seniors course to learn more about aging, cognition, and dementia (with its symptoms, risks, and behaviors) to provide better assistance for those in need.

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