

Can exercising your brain prevent memory loss?

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Participating in certain mental activities, like reading magazines or crafting in middle age or later in life, may delay or prevent memory loss, according to a study released today that will be presented at the American Academy of Neurology's 61st Annual Meeting in Seattle, April 25 to May 2, 2009.

The study involved 197 people between the ages of 70 and 89 with mild cognitive impairment, or diagnosed memory loss, and 1,124 people that age with no memory problems. Both groups answered questions about their daily activities within the past year and in middle age, when they were between 50 to 65 years old.

The study found that during later years, reading books, playing games, participating in computer activities and doing craft activities such as pottery or quilting led to a 30 to 50 percent decrease in the risk of developing memory loss compared to people who did not do those activities. People who watched television for less than seven hours a day in later years were 50 percent less likely to develop memory loss than people who watched for more than seven hours a day.

People who participated in social activities and read magazines during middle age were about 40 percent less likely to develop memory loss than those who did not do those activities.

"This study is exciting because it demonstrates that aging does not need to be a passive process. By simply engaging in cognitive exercise, you

can protect against future memory loss," said study author Yonas Geda, MD, MSc, a neuropsychiatrist at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, and a member of the American Academy of Neurology. "Of course, the challenge with this type of research is that we are relying on past memories of the participants, therefore, we need to confirm these findings with additional research."

Source: American Academy of Neurology

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