

Can Memory Be Improved? A Meta-Analysis Suggests It Does

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A meta-analysis published in the current issue of *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics* by Swiss investigators B. Metternich and associates indicates the effectiveness of non pharmacological interventions on memory complaints.

Subjective [memory](#) complaints (SMC) in the absence of psychiatric or neurological disorders are common among older adults. Although increasing numbers of individuals are suffering from SMC, research into interventions alleviating SMC is sparse. The present systematic review was conducted in order to present a clearer picture of the quality, quantity and outcomes of SMC intervention research.

PubMed and PsychInfo were searched with a comprehensive search string delivering 4,496 hits. Abstracts and - if applicable - full texts of these studies were screened by independent raters according to predefined criteria. Fourteen relevant studies were included in the review. The categories of intervention were: conventional memory training (MT; n = 8), expectancy change (EC: cognitive restructuring, psychoeducation, etc.; n = 5), combined interventions (n = 5), physical training (n = 1), and physical and mental training combined (n = 2).

The outcomes were: subjective memory measures, objective memory, depressive symptoms and well-being. EC, followed by combined interventions, was most efficient in influencing subjective memory. MT or physical and mental training combined were not efficient. On objective memory, MT was the only efficient intervention.

No effects were found on depressive symptoms and well-being, with low numbers of studies in these comparisons.

EC seems to be most efficient in influencing SMC, whereas in objective memory MT is the only effective intervention. Depressive symptoms or well-being do not seem to be influenced significantly by any of the interventions. To date, the number of high-quality publications on SMC interventions is relatively low. More randomized controlled trials including measures of [depressive symptoms](#) and well-being are needed.

More information: Metternich, B.; Kosch, D.; Kriston, L.; Härter, M.; Hüll, M. The Effects of Nonpharmacological Interventions on Subjective Memory Complaints: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Psychother Psychosom* 2010;79:6-19.

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