

How to stay sharp in retirement

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October is Canada's Healthy Workplace Month, but how does one stay mentally fit after the 40-hour workweek is traded in for the gold watch?

The more you want to use your brain—and the more you enjoy doing it—the more likely you are to stay sharp as you age. This is according to findings recently published in the *Journals of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences* by a team of Concordia University researchers.

The new study has three major findings that can help forecast cognitive ability in one's golden years:

1. The more one seeks out and enjoys cognitively demanding activities, the less likely one is to experience cognitive decline later in life.
2. Doing a variety of different cognitive activities helps boost brainpower post-retirement.
3. People who exhibit even mild signs of depression are more likely to show a decline in brainpower once they leave the office for good.

First author Larry Baer explains that, "retirement usually occurs right around the time when normal age-related declines in cognitive function come to the fore. So it is important to understand what is happening to brainpower during this period and to identify risk factors for [mental decline](#), as well as factors that will help protect against it."

This study has far-reaching implications. Says Baer, "it is my hope that

these results will influence the design of future interventions aimed at maintaining the [cognitive health](#) of retirees. This can be done by focusing on getting people to intensify their engagement in a variety of cognitive activities even if they have lower levels of motivation to do so. It is equally important to address symptoms of depression to help fight against [cognitive decline](#)."

Baer, who is currently a PhD candidate at Concordia, worked with fellow researchers Nassim Tabri, Mervin Blair and Dorothea Bye, under the leadership of senior authors Dolores Pushkar and Karen Li. They used data collected over four years, from 333 recent retirees. Participants, who were an average age of 59 and mostly in good health and free of any serious mobility limitations when the study started, underwent assessments of cognition, motivation and activities once a year.

More information: psychogerontology.oxfordjournals.org/doi/10.1093/psychger/68/5/655

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