

# Teaching an old brain new tricks

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(HealthDay)—You might pride yourself on your ability to multitask. But research shows that brain health may suffer when multitasking involves many gadgets, such as surfing the web or playing a video game on your

phone while you're also watching TV.

According to research published in the journal *PLoS One*, multitasking can change the structure of the brain, and not for the good.

MRI scans done on study participants who reported doing higher amounts of this so-called media multitasking revealed smaller gray matter density in the region of the brain most linked with higher reasoning and emotion. They performed worse on mentally challenging tasks and had more emotional difficulties in social situations.

Now for the good news. Other studies have shown that certain activities can increase gray matter density in the brain, including the behavior training technique called mindfulness meditation. It teaches you to focus on the here and now to conquer a wide variety of problems, from anxiety to overeating.

More than providing distraction or entertainment, certain video games, when played with undivided attention, can actually improve different skills. For instance, action games can enhance your ability to track multiple objects in a short time span, while matching and memory games can improve visual search tasks.

Even more impressive, learning a second language may help improve [brain](#) function regardless of how old you are when you start. Plus, it can be a lot of fun, especially if you travel to a foreign country to put it to use.

**More information:** To learn about the many benefits of learning another language for people of all ages, visit the [American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages](#).

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