

# Brain games are fun, but don't expect any cures, says expert

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Wordle, the wildly popular five-word guessing game, has been called

"genius" and "the pandemic game we didn't know we needed," but don't count on it to improve your brain power a UO psychology professor says.

So-called "[brain games](#)" are mostly hype, said Ulrich Mayr, who researches aging and cognition as the UO's the Robert and Beverly Lewis Professor in Neuroscience. Rather than making you smarter, stopping [brain](#) aging or warding off dementia, people simply get better at playing the games.

"I'm sure it uses your [brain power](#), but using your brain power doesn't give you more brain power. It doesn't work like that," Mayr said. "You shouldn't assume that playing games will make you brighter or stop brain aging or ward off Alzheimer's."

A [statement issued in 2014](#) by a panel of the world's leading neuroscientists and psychologists, including Mayr, said playing games like Sudoku or doing crossword puzzles are not proven to help brain health. In fact, a [healthy diet](#), regular exercise and [social activity](#) are better for staying mentally sharp than time spent on brain games.

In general, whether it's coffee with a friend or engaging in an [online game](#), Mayr said anything that puts people in a good mood has a positive effect.

"A positive mood makes people broader in their thinking, makes them more action-oriented," he said. "It shuts out ruminations that might be going on otherwise, so yes, it's good, unless it keeps you from doing even better things."

Wordle is the brainchild of Josh Wardle, a UO alumnus and [software engineer](#) in Brooklyn who created the [game](#) to entertain he and his wife during the pandemic. Once per day, players have six chances to guess the

mystery five-letter word.

A game that started with just 90 players in November has grown to millions of daily players as well as spawned a slew of clones, including Jewdle, a distinctly Jewish version of the popular game, Bickle for cycling fans or Nerdle for math people, to name a few. The New York Times recently announced it had purchased the game.

Although it won't keep you from getting dementia, Mayr, who admits to playing Wordle himself, concedes that without question the game is fun and addictive.

"Oh yeah, it's great. It's fun and doing fun things that keep your mind occupied is a good thing," he said. "But when you engage in any activity you need to also think about the opportunity cost, for example, if you're sitting around all day and watching TV, then playing Wordle is probably a better use of your time."

Provided by University of Oregon

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