

Cognitive training sessions helps seniors cope with memory loss, study finds

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Credit: Anny Pappa from Pexels

Can training your brain to remember things help you ward off the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease? A new Canadian study suggests that yes, it can—even five years after you received the training.

A simple series of cognitive training sessions—two hours a week for eight weeks—was enough to help a cohort of Quebecers with [mild cognitive impairment](#) halt their cognitive decline, the study found.

Led by researchers at Université de Montréal, the results are [published](#) today in *Alzheimer's & Dementia: Diagnosis, Assessment & Disease Monitoring*.

"A few years ago, we showed that [early intervention](#) can improve cognitive function in people at risk of Alzheimer's disease; we had also observed cerebral changes showing these people had compensated mentally for their memory loss," explained the study's lead author, UdeM neuropsychology professor Sylvie Belleville, holder of the Canada Research Chair in Cognitive Neuroscience of Aging and Brain Plasticity.

"We recontacted these people five years later and still observed that the benefits on memory and that a measure of dementia had not changed at all in the treated group, whereas there was a decline in the untreated group," said Belleville, who works at the UdeM-affiliated Center de recherche de l'Institut universitaire de gériatrie de Montréal is also director of the Quebec Network for Research on Aging.

"These results are important," Belleville said, "because this kind of intervention is non-pharmacological—there are no drugs involved—and can have a significant impact on the lives of those affected."

145 seniors recruited

In all, 145 seniors with mild cognitive impairment were recruited from memory clinics in Montreal and Quebec City to take part in cognitive training known as MEMO+ between the springs of 2012 and 2015.

They were taught a number of memory strategies, working on things like

memorizing names of people, remembering things to do or lists of items, and focusing their attention to better memorize.

The participants in the control groups either received no intervention or received a psycho-social intervention to improve their overall psychological well-being, learning things like [anger management](#) and problem-solving.

Not only were the benefits of the cognitive training visible six months later, they stayed evident five years later. By contrast, there were no cognitive benefits from the no-contact or psycho-social sessions.

The results "underscore the potential of cognitive training as a preventive approach for cognitively vulnerable older adults, reducing [cognitive decline](#) and potentially delaying the onset of dementia," the study concluded.

"Furthermore, it is noteworthy that these enduring effects were achieved through a relatively brief, cost-effective intervention that can be readily implemented as a [preventive measure](#) for at-risk individuals."

More information: Sylvie Belleville et al, Five-year effects of cognitive training in individuals with mild cognitive impairment, *Alzheimer's & Dementia: Diagnosis, Assessment & Disease Monitoring* (2024). [DOI: 10.1002/dad2.12626](https://doi.org/10.1002/dad2.12626)

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