MAINTAINING OUR THINKING SKILLS AS WE AGE

Maintaining our Cognitive Health
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Maintaining Cognitive Health: April 16, 2015
Age has its advantages.  
Too bad I don’t remember what they are.
On Aging.....

- Everybody does it!
- There are some parts of it we can control (a little)!
- It’s not for wimps!
- It’s when we become our better selves!
Cognition/Thinking Skills

- Cognition: our thinking skills

  the mental skills and abilities that humans have to process, understand, and gain knowledge and information

  the abilities used to organize our thoughts so that we can get things done in our daily lives; consists of attention, memory, and all-inclusive problem-solving abilities
What our Cognition Does for us…..

- Perceive: using all 5 senses
- Attend: focus, concentrate, sustain
- Remember: short-term and long-term
- Move: mobilize and manipulate
- Communicate: organize thoughts, thoughts to output
- Process: understand visual, spatial, temporal
- Organize and Administrate: executive functions

adapted from Dr. Pascale Michelon
“What Are Cognitive Abilities and Skills, And How to Boost Them.”
SharpBrains.com/blog/2006
Why is Brain Health Important

- Your brain is your computer control center
- Brain health and heart health are related
- Brain health and overall health are related
- Quality of life and independence
NORMAL AGING
“Sims, when did you first realize you weren’t as smart as your phone?”
Typical Changes – As we grow older (and better!)

- Natural decline in brain weight
- Loss of neurons
- Decreased levels of neurotransmitters
- Oxidative damage

- Minimal changes noted with successful aging
- Slightly noticeable changes with typical aging
- Mild, moderate, or severe changes with poor brain health

adapted from Nancy Helm-Estebrooks, Sc.D., CCC-SLP. BC-ANCDS
Cognitive Changes Associated with Typical Aging
November 17, 2011
A quick test:
Changes to Language

- Vocabulary may not change or may improve during the aging process, but word generation will decline.

A standardized test, the “Cognitive Linguistic Quick Test” demonstrates normative data as ages 18-69 being able to generate 21-25 words within 1 minute given a specific category; but ages 70-89 only being able to generate 16-20 words within 1 minute.

adapted from Nancy Helm-Estebrooks, Sc.D., CCC-SLP. BC-ANCDS
Cognitive Changes Associated with Typical Aging
November 17, 2011
“She has probably forgotten more than I will ever know.”

Dr. C. Danz
Changes to Cognition

- Cognitive decline can begin even before age 60, but we still accumulate knowledge through our 60s, so may not be detected until well into our 70s.
- Cognitive decline might appear in spatial orientation, speed of information processing, and reasoning.

“When does Age-related Cognitive begin?” Timothy Salthouse, 2008
Cognition

- Working memory and information processing may decrease as we age, which may affect how we store information and encode that information into our memory.
Another quick test....
Memory does not have to decline

“People assume that memory decline is a function of being human, and therefore natural. The reason for the monitored decline in human memory performance is because we actually do anti-Olympic training. What we do to the brain is the equivalent of sitting someone down to train for the Olympics and making sure he drinks ten cans of beer a day, smokes fifty cigarettes, drives to work, and maybe does some exercise once a month that’s violent and damaging, and spends the rest of the time watching television. And then we wonder why that person doesn’t do well in the Olympics.

That’s what we’ve been doing to memory.”

Tony Buzan
SUCCESSFUL AGING
“Successful aging is multidimensional, encompassing the avoidance of disease and disability, the maintenance of high physical and cognitive function, and sustained engagement in social and productive activities. Research has identified factors predictive of success in these critical domains.”

John W. Rowe and Robert L. Kahn, The Journals of Gerontology
Predictors of Successful Aging

1-Cognition:

a) Education
b) Pulmonary Peak Expiratory Flow
c) Strenuous physical activity at and around your home
d) Self-efficacy

John W. Rowe, MD and Robert L. Kahn, PhD
Predictors of Successful Aging

2- Physical:
   a) socio-demographic status
   b) body mass
   c) blood pressure
   d) early cognitive performance

John W. Rowe, MD and Robert L. Kahn, PhD
Predictors of Successful Aging

- 3- Continuing Engagement with Life
- 4- Response to Stress

- John W. Rowe, MD and Robert L. Kahn, PhD
Ways to keep your brain ACTIVE!

- Read as much as you can
- Crossword puzzles, word search, or Sudoku
- Try and solve a Rubik’s cube
- Play chess or backgammon
- Switch your dominant hand for a while; try to eat, or write a note
- Play a musical instrument or learn one if you don’t currently play – take piano lessons
- Stay socially active
- Attend free courses/lectures
- Learn a new language
Keep your brain ACTIVE!

- Go for a run/brisk walk (Bonus: for a boost to your memory power, go with a friend!)
- Play golf, tennis, or any sport
- Do yoga
- Play pool or shuffleboard or darts or bocce ball
- Subscribe to a daily newsletter or get a quote of the day
- Practice memorizing things
- Learn a new word every day
- Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables
- Control your blood pressure
- Play board games
Keep your brain ACTIVE!

- Travel, preferably with someone, and talk about the things you see
- Recall and talk about the events of your day with a friend or companion
- Take up a new hobby
- Take notes when receiving important information
- Count backwards (starting at 200, count backwards subtracting 7 each time)
- Play Boggle or Scrabble
- Attend plays
- Get plenty of sleep
- Enjoy tea and/or coffee (4 cups of green tea or 2 cups of coffee)
- Eat fish
- Take time to relax
- Change your routine and make your brain have to think about what comes next
- Reorganize your desk or your closet
- Take in as many details of a room as you can and challenge yourself to remember where everything was located - fun to play in a waiting room and then you can come back through and test yourself
- Play video games
- Play games on your phone or computer (look for “thinking” apps)
- Laugh more!
- Enjoy some quiet time
- Enjoy a glass of red wine
- Take a nap
- Keep up with current events
- Join a club – or create your own club and ask others to join
- Eat food rich in antioxidants
- Don’t skip breakfast!
- Pay more attention to your sensory experiences – literally, stop and smell the roses
- Write a letter or type an email
- Take up gardening
References

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