



Why joining a book club may stave off dementia

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Keeping the brain active through social activities help to improve its health

[[Original article in the Daily Mail](#)]

Taking part in a book club or language class builds brain strength in old age - but 'brain trainer' games might not help at all.

Regularly stimulating the brain with mental exercises and activities is important for improving brain health and protecting against dementia, a report found.

Everything from joining classes, to interacting with grandchildren, playing chess and gardening could help.

But there was little evidence that 'brain training' apps and computer games had the same effect, the report said.

While people could improve their performance in a game by playing it regularly, there was little evidence they improved people's everyday thinking abilities.

The Engage Your Brain report ([PDF - 404 Kb](#)) - an analysis of international research on brain health - was carried out by the [Global Council on Brain Health \(GCBH\)](#).

It said age was no barrier to improving brain health, with mental stimulation having a positive effect no matter how old someone was.

The report said: 'It is never too late to benefit from cognitively stimulating activities, and you can learn new things at any age.'

'In the same way that you need to maintain exercise for physical strength, you need to participate in mental activities to support the health of your brain.

'There are many ways to incorporate such activities into your daily life. For example, deliberately engaging and challenging your brain over time - long after your formal schooling is over - results in better cognitive aging for adults.'

It said learning something new was the best way to engage the brain - and suggested retirement was the ideal time to pick up a new hobby.

But it warned people must take part in activities they enjoyed and were interested in, and do them regularly to get the full benefit.

Taking part with a friend was likely to help people stick with learning something new, it added.

It warned many 'brain training' games on the market lacked evidence 'to support the claims that companies have promoted'.

It added that while the games might help improve one aspect of thinking, like memory, vocabulary or speed of processing, there was little evidence they could help with overall brain function or improvements that meant someone could maintain their independence or quality of life in old age.

James Goodwin, chief scientist at [Age UK](#) - which supports GCBH - said: 'Many people think that all thinking skills decline with age, and we know there is certainly a lot of fear around this happening.

'But decline is not inevitable, and there are plenty of activities that we can start today that can provide benefits for brain health.

'If they are new to you and require your concentrated attention they may even be activities that you do regularly in your life, such as playing with grandchildren, gardening or playing cards.'

He said that while it was never too late to learn a new skill, people should not wait until they were older to improve brain health.

'The younger you start challenging yourself with mentally stimulating activities, the better your brain function will be as you age,' he added.

More information

- [Read the original article in the Daily Mail](#)
- Find out about the local services available to help in our [Dementia](#) and [Reducing the risk of dementia](#) pages
- Check out [activities and sessions](#) in the three boroughs.

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