

[IMAGE]

Healthy Brain: Mind Over Matter

By Editorial Staff

In our busy, hectic lives, there's nothing like a good game now and then to take your mind off the madness. Young, old or anywhere in between, board games, puzzles, chess, checkers and various other endeavors entertain and challenge us. But do you know they offer another benefit, one that could literally help you ward off disease?

Cognitive decline is one of the least understood – and scariest – health complications associated with aging. Even mild cognitive impairment (MCI) causes a slight, but noticeable decline in memory and thinking skills, and increases the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. Symptoms of MCI, according to the Alzheimer's Association, include "[forgetting] important information that he or she would previously have recalled easily, such as appointments, conversations or recent events" and impairments in "the ability to make sound decisions, judge the time or sequence of steps needed to complete a complex task, or visual perception."

Worried about MCI? Let's revisit the game issue, because research suggests keeping your mind sharp and engaged with games that make you think can help reduce your risk of cognitive decline. The latest study found that playing games reduced the risk of new-onset MCI by 22 percent in adults ages 70 and older. What's more, the benefits weren't limited to the games described above; working on crafts was associated with a 28 percent reduction in MCI risk, computer use a 30 percent reduction, and social activities a 23 percent reduction.

It's all about mental stimulation, suggest the study authors. So when it comes to staying mentally healthy with age, remember: think mind over matter. Talk to your doctor to learn more.

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