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Five Activities for Older Adults that Stimulate the Mind

If you're an older adult — or are taking care of an aging loved one, these simple activities will be fun, easy, and entertaining.

1. Learning (or Relearning) a Language
2. Reading – or Listening to Audiobooks
3. Board Games or Puzzles
4. Smartphone Puzzle and Game Apps
5. Connect With Loved Ones – Near or Far

Six Pillars of Preventing Alzheimer's Disease: Part 2

Pillar #3: Social engagement

Human beings are highly social creatures. We don't thrive in isolation, and neither do our brains. Staying socially engaged may even protect against Alzheimer's disease and dementia in later life, so make developing and maintaining a strong network of friends a priority.

You don't need to be a social butterfly or the life of the party, but you do need to regularly connect face-to-face with someone who cares about you and makes you feel heard. While many of us become more isolated as we get older, it's never too late to meet others and develop new friendships:

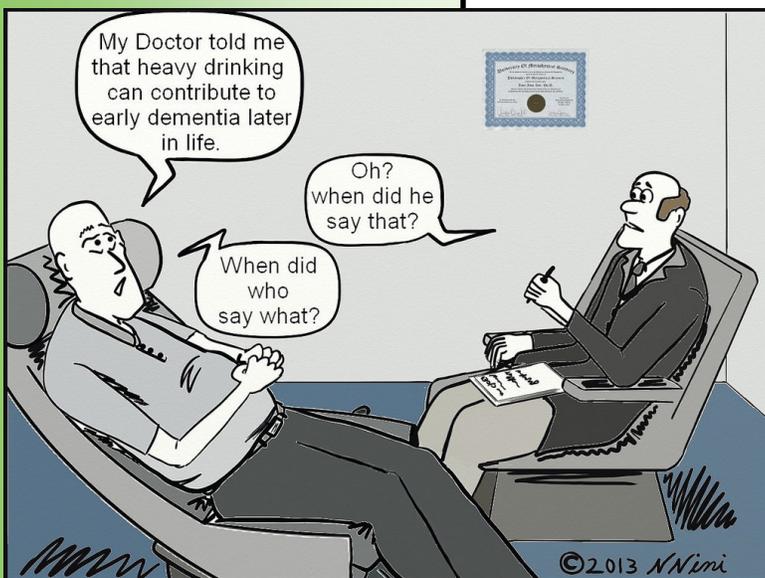
- Volunteer
- Join a club or social group
- Visit your local community center or senior center
- Take group classes (such as at the gym or a community college)
- Reach out over the phone or email
- Connect to others via social networks such as Facebook

- Get to know your neighbors
- Make a weekly date with friends

Get out (go to the movies, the park, museums, and other public places)

Pillar #4: Mental stimulation

Those who continue learning new things and challenging their brains throughout life are less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease and dementia. In essence, you need to "use it or lose it." In the groundbreaking NIH ACTIVE study, older adults who received as few as 10 sessions of mental training not only improved their cognitive functioning in daily activities in the months after the training, but continued to show long-lasting improvements **10 years later.**



Activities involving multiple tasks or requiring communication, interaction, and organization offer the greatest protection. Set aside time each day to stimulate your brain:

Learn something new. Study a foreign language, practice a musical instrument, learn to paint or sew, or read the newspaper or a good book. One of the best ways to take up a new hobby is to sign up for a class and then schedule regular times for practicing. The greater the novelty, complexity, and challenge, the greater the benefit.

Raise the bar for an existing activity. If you're not keen on learning something new, you can still challenge your brain by increasing your skills and knowledge of something you already do. For example, if you can play the piano and don't want to learn a new instrument, commit to learning a new piece of music or improving how well you play your favorite piece. Or if you're a golfer, aim to lower your handicap.

Practice memorization. Start with something short, progressing to something a little more involved, such as the 50 U.S. state capitals. Create rhymes and patterns to strengthen your memory connections.

Enjoy strategy games, puzzles, and riddles. Brain teasers and strategy games provide a great mental workout and build your capacity to form and retain cognitive associations. Do a crossword puzzle, play board games, cards, or word and number games such as Scrabble or Sudoku.

Practice the 5 W's. Observe and report like a crime detective. Keep a "Who, What, Where, When, and Why" list of your daily experiences. Capturing visual details keeps your neurons firing.

Follow the road less traveled. Take a new route, eat with your non-dominant hand, rearrange your computer file system. Vary your habits regularly to create new brain pathways.

[Pillar #5: Stress management](#)

Chronic or persistent stress can take a heavy toll on the brain, leading to shrinkage in a key memory area, hampering nerve cell growth, and increasing the risk of Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Yet simple stress management tools can minimize its harmful effects.

Breathe! Quiet your stress response with deep, abdominal breathing. Restorative breathing is powerful, simple, and free!

Schedule daily relaxation activities. Keeping stress under control requires regular effort. Make relaxation a priority, whether it's a walk in the park, playtime with your dog, yoga, or a soothing bath.

Nourish inner peace. Regular meditation, prayer, reflection, and religious practice may immunize you against the damaging effects of stress.

Make fun a priority. All work and no play is not good for your stress levels or your brain. Make time for leisure activities that bring you joy, whether it be stargazing, playing the piano, or working on your bike.

Keep your sense of humor. This includes the ability to laugh at yourself. The act of laughing helps your body fight stress.

