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Press Information

Stimulating your brain intellectually slows ageing.

It is often said that the more the brain is used the better it works. This is especially true for the elderly, though we still don't know how. An analysis performed by Tasnime Akbaraly and Claudine Berr, in Inserm U888 unit directed by Karen Ritchie, showed that older persons regularly participating in "intellectually stimulating" leisure activities such as crossword puzzles, card games, voluntary association involvement or practising an artistic activity had a 50% reduction in the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease during 4 years of follow-up of the Three Cities cohort study (in Bordeaux, Dijon and Montpellier). This work, published in the review *Neurology* dated September 15, therefore suggests that these leisure activities should be encouraged in older adults to delay the onset of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

Faced with the ageing of the population, it is essential to develop prevention strategies to slow the development of age-related diseases such as dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Researchers have therefore studied the relationship between participation in leisure activities by the elderly, cognitive reserve and the occurrence of dementia.

This work was performed using data from the Three Cities epidemiological study. This is a large cohort study of persons aged 65 years or more conducted to investigate the relations between vascular disease and dementia. In this study, initiated in 1999 and still on-going, the leisure activities practised by participants were collected for 6000 subjects in the towns of Dijon and Montpellier. In particular, data were recorded using questionnaires on lifestyle and leisure and a neuropsychological assessment to detect cases of dementia.

Four different categories of leisure activity could be distinguished from the data collected in this study:

- "*Intellectually stimulating*" leisure activities such as crossword puzzles, card games, involvement with voluntary associations, going to the cinema/theatre, or practising an artistic activity)
- *passive leisure activities* (television, music, radio, knitting/sewing)
- *physical leisure activities* (gardening, DIY, walking)
- *social leisure activities* (entertaining friends/family)

During the 4 years of follow-up, 161 new cases of dementia were documented and validated by an expert committee.

The data collected by the researchers demonstrated that persons who participated in intellectually stimulating leisure activities at least twice weekly were half as likely to develop

dementia or Alzheimer's disease as those who practised these activities less than once a week. This difference was independent of the other categories of leisure activities and also educational level, socio-professional category, gender and lifestyle- (smoking, alcohol) and/or health-related factors. On the other hand, the other categories of leisure activity (passive, physical and social) induced no significant reduction in the risk of dementia.

This association between regular participation in intellectually stimulating leisure activities and the reduction in the risk of dementia suggests that encouraging older adults to practise this type of leisure activity may be a useful public health intervention.

For more information

Source:

“Leisure activities and the risk of dementia in the elderly”

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