

Video games may boost brain health

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STATISTICALLY, someone developed dementia in the time it took you to read this sentence.



It's a mentally debilitating illness that significantly hinders cognitive function, and an estimated 139 million people will be living with it by 2050. According to two brain health experts from Binghamton University, however, there are ways to minimise the risk of cognitive decline.

“What matters most is that you challenge yourself, which often comes naturally when doing something new,” cognitive neuroscientists Ian Mcdonough and Michael Dulas wrote for the Conversation.

According to the experts, it's important to participate in mental tasks that stimulate the frontal and parietal lobes of the brain.

Together, the lobes manage thinking, judgement and attention.

To achieve that, the mental tasks must genuinely be challenging, sometimes even frustrating. It's for that reason, research has shown, some traditional video games can offer cognitive boosts, while “brain training” games offer mixed results.

“Ironically, you might already be training your brain by playing effortful games that are not marketed as ‘brain training,’” they wrote.

“For example, games such as Tetris or real-time strategy games such as Rise of Nations have shown improvements in players' cognition. Research has even shown that playing Super Mario 64 can result in increases in brain volume in regions such as the hippocampus, the memory center of the brain.”

A misconception is that a brain training exercise will improve all cognitive functions at once. In reality, different tasks can help develop different functions. The key to staying sharp is participating in a variety of challenging tasks.

“If you're a word person, try a numbers-based game,” they wrote.

“If you love math, consider a word game or puzzle. Choosing a task that makes you feel uncomfortable gives you the best shot at maintaining and even improving your cognition. Once you start feeling a sense of ease and familiarity, that's a sign that it's time to switch tasks, change the game or at least add some challenge by advancing to a new level of difficulty that feels just beyond your reach.”

– The Atlanta Journal-constitution/ Tribune News Service