

- Reading

Read all about how to boost your brain health

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Cognitive thinking abilities, such as planning and organising, remembering, making decisions and more, all affect how well we do everyday tasks, and whether we can live independently or not.



However, as we age, changes in these abilities are common, which may impact the speed of how we find words and recall names, cause problems with multitasking, and lead to a decrease in the ability to pay attention.

We now have a lot of advancements in place to help keep our bodies healthy, but not a lot for our brains, says Dr AmirHomayoun Javadi, associate professor in cognitive neuroscience at the University of Kent.

“This is why we are having more Alzheimer’s and dementia cases than before, because our bodies tend to live longer, and our brains are basically not keeping up,” he says.

Dr Javadi says simply taking up reading can be one of the best ways to keep your brain healthy.

Statistics from The Reading Agency show that benefits of reading can help those suffering with dementia, as it helps to keep a sense of identity, encourages reminiscing, and sharing of new ideas through a connection with stories and information.

But what other benefits are there to reading for those over the age of 65?

Preventing cognitive decline

Studies have found 10–20% of those over the age of 65 have mild cognitive impairment, with 10–20% of that group going on to develop dementia over a one-year period.

However, one of the things about reading and keeping your mind active is the concept of cognitive enhancement, or at least preventing cognitive decline, says medical doctor Dr Charlotte Lee-Sinclair.

“Repeated stimulation of neuron connections through acts such as reading strengthens synaptic connections. You can form new synapses and prune unnecessary ones,” says Dr Sinclair.

“You can also get remapping where, if there is some damage in your brain, undamaged areas can start taking over the functions of damaged ones. Therefore you start to see improvement of what we call fluid cognition.

“This means abilities that allow us to problem solve, plan and operate in the world, improve.”

Stress reduction

A survey by Ciphir of 2,000 UK adults, found that 86% of people feel stressed at least once a month, and as many as one in nine experience stress every day.

However, Dr Sinclair says reading helps you to wind down.

“We are all obsessed with our phones, so having the opportunity to just create a bit of a wind-down routine and also activate your brain in such a way that is more relaxing, just helps you with things like stress.”

Social connection

Research from Age UK, shows 270,000 people aged 65 and over go a week without speaking to a friend or family member, and one in 14 older people in the UK are often lonely.

However, the social aspect of reading can be both a solution for loneliness and your brain health.

“If you are part of a book club, after reading the book and discussing with other people, it will massively activate a lot of different brain areas,” Javadi says.

“Most importantly, it puts you within a social context which is super important for a healthy brain and better cognition.”