

COGNITIVE DECLINE IN AGING PEOPLE

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As people get older, a decline in cognitive abilities is inevitable. Memory loss becomes more evident and frequent. It can get frustrating and worrying especially when it is combined with physical weakening and a higher risk of diseases. Because of these, routinary tasks become more exhausting. Lifting and other strenuous activities are seemingly impossible. Teacher tasks are no exception.

According to the “Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020” (WHO, 2013), mental health is an integral part of health and well-being and includes not only individual characteristics but also social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental factors. It is thus important to engage in activities that will enhance mental health or at the least delay its decline. Here are ways that are found to protect people from mental decline.

Exercise

Much has been positively said about exercise and that is because it has a wide range of benefits. Not only does it do good for the body, but studies also proved that participating in a program of regular exercise improved cognitive function in people with memory problems. Likewise, the website health.harvard.edu claims that exercise may be particularly advantageous for people who carry the APOE4 gene variant, which makes people more susceptible to Alzheimer's.

Sleep

It may be easy as it sounds but having a peaceful life these days is seemingly a rare opportunity. With all the many stressors and problems that teachers and students face during the pandemic, a seven to eight hours sleep at night may be considered a blessing.

Getting ample sleep benefits the entire body, especially the brain and may help prevent cognitive decline. Studies also have shown that people who get enough sleep score higher in tests. This is because learning and memory are consolidated during sleep.

Diet

The Mediterranean diet, which includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts and seeds, olive oil, a moderate amount of fish, poultry, and dairy products, is recommended for the prevention of mental decline. It also appears to lower the risk of developing MCI or Mild Cognitive Impairment and slow the progression to dementia.

Social Interaction

Evidence suggests that social interaction is as important as physical activity and a healthy diet. It helps protect memory and cognitive functions as people get older. Research shows that the more people engage in social interactions, the less likely for them to experience cognitive decline. Accordingly, depression which often is attached to being alone, or to loneliness can be associated with faster cognitive decline. Being surrounded by a strong network of people who care and support a person can help lower stress levels. Social activities can make use of mental processes such as attention and memory which strengthens cognition. Furthermore, social engagement intensifies neural networks which slows down normal age-related declines.

Brain Stimulating Activities

There are a lot of cognitive-enhancing activities that people can do during the lockdown. Drawing can make use of perception and attention. Studies also suggest that drawing can prevent memory loss. Reading is also a good way to keep the mind sharp. Some researchers concluded that reading can prevent the onset of Alzheimer's disease. It makes use of one's imagination and for book lovers, reading can always be entertaining. Another activity is Counting Letters with which one must select a paragraph from a book

and count the number of times a particular letter appears. This helps maintain attention and focus for an extended period. Card games like solitaire and poker can improve cognitive functions such as memory retention and problem-solving. Word games and board games can also be of great aid for cognitive improvement. Sudoku and other number games are good ways to enhance if not maintain problem-solving skills, too. Solving puzzles are fun ways to improve cognitive functions too as it engages a lot of brain activities.

There sure are more ways to prevent cognitive decline, however, in every goal, it is the will to do that will keep us all at the best of our body and mind.

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