

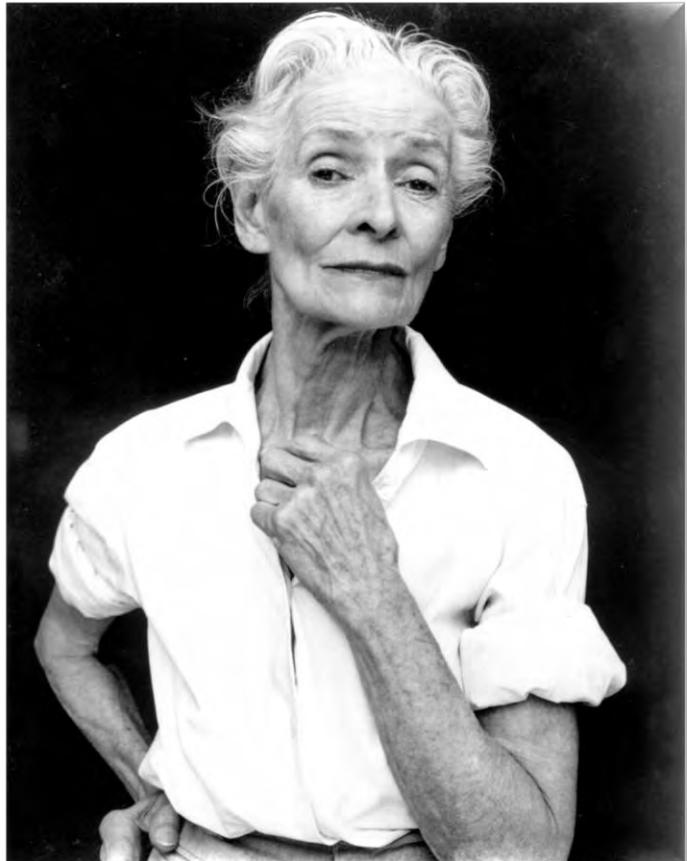
## Maximize Your Memory

By Kate McCarthy

Jessica noticed feeling fuzzy in her mind more and more after she reached her 70's. She joked about being muddle-minded and excused herself laughing about having a 'senior moment' when she couldn't remember an important fact. Jessica had always prided herself on being sharp and so wasn't about to let age steal her quick wits. So she decided to get proactive about her brain and began energetically exercising her mind. She was amazed by the results.

The brain is an organ and like all organs in the human body it experiences some natural changes as we age, yet loss of memory does not have to be one of them. Mental decline due to aging is preventable and even reversible with the right attitude and some dedication to exercising the mind.

According to Dr. Dharma Singh Khalsa, President and Medical Director of the Alzheimer's Research & Prevention Foundation, seniors and the elderly can avoid mental aging by keeping the brain active. By proactively engaging the mind in "vigorous mental exercise" he calls brain aerobics, Dr. Khalsa states that mind and memory can be improved in those starting to show signs of mental deterioration. The



*Memory loss is not a normal or natural process of aging.*

theory that it is normal and inevitable for the elderly to experience memory loss is no longer believed to be true.

## Let Einstein be your role model

Albert Einstein has long been considered the most brilliant man in history, yet he had very normal brain cells. After his death, a pathologist examined Einstein's brain tissue and discovered that the cells, or neurons, were no different from that of an average person. What was surprising was that the supporting structure around Einstein's brain cells was far more developed than average. These supporting structures, called glial cells, are the connections or pathways between brain cells allowing them to communicate effectively. Einstein's glial cells were numerous and well developed which could account for his remarkable intellectual ability.

## Brain challenge

It is a proven fact that certain brain challenging activities will improve existing glial cells as well as actually create new ones. Studies show that mental exercise regenerates brain cells, causing them to grow larger and stronger and become more resistant to the effects of aging. Cognitive exercise also increases the number of connections in the brain which unlocks, activates and sustains brain power no matter what our age, but to be effective the mental activity must meet three criteria:

1. It must engage your attention
2. It must break up a routine activity in an unexpected way
3. It must involve two or more of the senses.

## How to exercise the brain

Just as physical exercise is essential to healthy longevity; mental exercise is the key to fighting loss of cognitive ability and memory, and a combination of the two is the best bet to remaining mentally agile as we age. Recent studies show that greatest results are found with a combination of physical and mental exercise. A 30 minute exercise routine, such as brisk walking, followed by stretching and then a 15-20 minute mental exercise, like a crossword puzzle, increases the efficiency and power of the brain. Jolting the brain out of its normal routines is also a brilliant way to improve cognitive agility. Learning a new language or reading a book for 10 minutes upside down stimulates the brain in amazing ways.

## It is pretty easy

Like all things we should do, getting into the habit of actually doing them is the hardest part. Mental exercises or activities are easy and can be fun. Since the combination of physical and mental exercise gets the best results, it is a good idea to add a few cognitive activities to the end of a morning exercise routine.

- Yoga followed by working on a cross word puzzle
- Take a brisk walk with a friend and discuss current events
- Exercise class followed by a Sudoku or a word game on your tablet
- Swim laps followed by working on a jigsaw puzzle

It has often said you can't teach old dog new tricks, but learning new things, especially for the aging, will improve brain functions, regenerate lost cognitive abilities and improve short term memory. So avoid watching TV and instead pick up a good book, write a poem, play a word game, get going with new a hobby or learn a new language. Proactively pursuing mental activity will improve connections in the brain, stimulate the mind and help improve memory.

Sources:

"The Power of Brain Aerobics: Maximize your Memory" brochure. Alzheimer's Research & Prevention Foundation.



Kate McCarthy is Director of Operations for HomeAid Health Care which provides services for the elderly who wish to remain safe and independent at home. HomeAid is sister company to Prairie Home Assisted Living which has served the physical, spiritual, mental and health needs of their Residents since 1999. Together the two family owned companies provide comprehensive care for the elderly in the Fox Valley of Wisconsin.