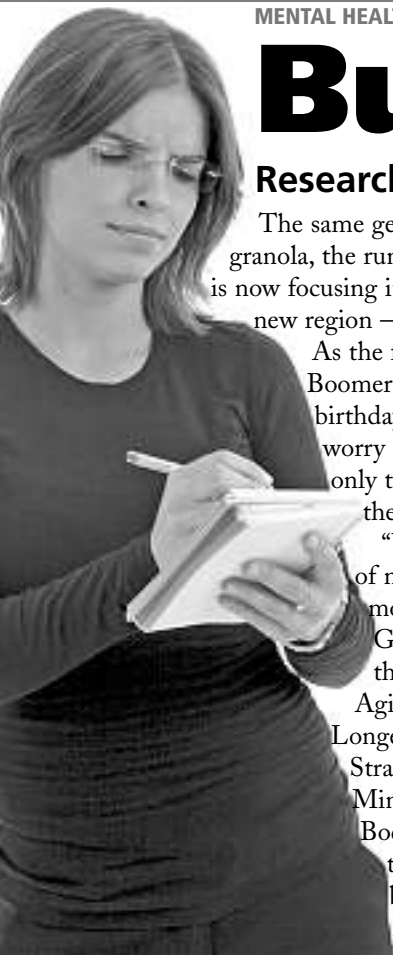


MENTAL HEALTH

Buffing up your brain

By Katherine Spitz
Akron Beacon Journal

Researchers advocate mental exercise to prevent Alzheimer's



The same generation that gave us granola, the running boom and Viagra is now focusing its fitness concerns on a new region — the brain.

As the first of the Baby Boomers celebrate their 60th birthdays, many are starting to worry about preserving not only their physical health but their mental agility, too.

“We’re seeing a sort of memory-fitness movement,” says Dr. Gary Small, director of the UCLA Center on Aging and author of “The Longevity Bible: 8 Essential Strategies for Keeping Your Mind Sharp and Your Body Young.” “The fact is that we’re living longer, but what’s the good of making it to 110 if you

don’t have your mental faculties?”

Like most researchers, Small advocates a use-it-or-lose-it approach to cognitive fitness. Though it doesn’t guarantee you’ll never fall victim to Alzheimer’s disease — just as a healthful diet and exercise don’t guarantee you’ll never have a heart attack — it may delay the onset of the disease or at least make a normal but aging brain more efficient.

In fact, a recent study by Small showed that after just two weeks on a program of healthful food, daily walks, relaxation techniques and mental exercises, participants had a significant improvement in verbal fluency — retrieving the right word from their memory banks quickly.

Such findings, coupled with an increase in U.S. life expectancy from age 47 to 77 in the past century, have given rise to a plethora of self-help books on bolstering brain power, two recent Nintendo video games aimed at Baby Boomers that purport

to “train your brain in minutes a day,” and even “Neurobics” classes in retirement communities.

Like other parts of the body, the brain does change with age. Synapses fire more slowly, some cells die off, and the overall mass of the organ shrinks.

But studies of twins show that not all of the change is genetically predetermined, nor is a resulting loss of mental agility necessarily inevitable.

“There are many factors involved in developing memory problems, just as there are for heart disease,” says Dr. Zaldy S. Tan, director of The Memory Clinic at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and author of “Age-Proof Your Mind: Detect, Delay, and Prevent Memory Loss — Before It’s Too Late.” “The important thing to remember is that there are things you can do to tip the scales in your favor.”

Recent studies on brain function show that older brains can be trained to perform

certain tasks as quickly as younger brains, that physical exercise is closely linked with mental sharpness, and that older adults who kept working or stayed active after retirement did significantly better on IQ tests than those who didn’t.

In fact, researchers have found that seniors are able to reverse the decline in mental abilities typically associated with aging by doing memory, reasoning and mental-processing exercises. Further, studies with mice have shown that physical exercise led to structural changes in the brain, prompting the growth of new neurons and the connections between them.

Those findings may explain why people who stay active mentally — as well as those who have higher levels of education — have lower rates of developing Alzheimer’s disease, which now afflicts half of Americans over age 85.

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MONTEREY BAY COSMETIC DERMATOLOGY ASSOCIATES

Is laser hair removal right for you?

Until the last few years, shaving, plucking, waxing and electrolysis were the only methods of removing unwanted hair.

In the early 1990’s, the first reports of using laser energy to selectively damage and disable actively growing hair follicles were published, and since the mid 1990’s, laser hair removal has become the “Gold Standard” method for hair removal.

In response to patient requests for permanent hair removal, Salinas dermatologist Dr. Kurt Lofgren and Physician Assistant Teresa McMillin have added a hair removal laser to their Cosmetic Dermatology practice. “We have had laser hair removal available now for over a year and it has quickly become one of the most popular procedures,” states Teresa, “Women want it everywhere: legs, arms, face, and bikini area. Men want it to

remove hair on the back, chest, arms, shoulders, neck, ears and other areas that are difficult to shave.”

Not everyone is a good candidate for laser hair removal. The hair must be darker than the surrounding skin. Tanned people with light hair are not candidates and tanned people with dark hair should wait until their tan fades. The laser can temporarily discolor or lighten skin if you’re tanned or dark-skinned. People with darker skin can be treated, but results are slower and more sessions are needed because the skin’s pigment can absorb too much laser energy during treatments. “The challenge is to permanently damage the hair follicle without hurting the skin”, says Teresa. “Using the latest technology,

we can adjust the settings so that even darker-skinned patients can be treated safely.” It’s best to do a one-on-one consultation since treatments are based on an individual’s skin and hair type.

Both Teresa and Dr. Lofgren emphasize the importance of avoiding both sun and sunless tanning products 2 weeks prior to the procedure. It is also important to note that because the pigment in the hair is the target for the laser, gray or white hair, which lacks pigment, cannot be effectively treated with any laser.

Hair grows at various stages, some active and some dormant. Laser energy has its greatest effect on active, growing hair follicles. This is why 3-6 treatments at fixed intervals (usually 4-8 weeks) are needed for permanent hair reduction. Teresa comments, “I like to use the analogy of weeding a garden. After the first few weeding sessions, only occasional “touch-ups” are needed.”

Those looking for laser hair removal should first check out the facility offering the procedure. The American Institutes of Laser Medicine (AILM) warns against discount laser hair removal clinics or salons, advising consumers look for established medical centers with excellent reputations.

“Watch out if the treatments look too cheap,” Teresa agrees, “Remember, this is a medical procedure and the professional should be selected with the same care you give to selecting a medical provider. You want treatment from a licensed professional that is specially trained in laser hair removal.”

For more information regarding laser hair removal, call Monterey Bay Cosmetic Dermatology Associates at 422-7815 or visit mbcosmeticderm.com. ❖

