



Cognitive Engagement & Brain Health

Myth: Doing crossword puzzles is an important part of maintaining your brain health.



What does the research say?

Although doing crossword puzzles is a great start, it is only one of an endless number of intellectually engaging activities that is good for your brain health. Research shows that people who are involved in a wide number and variety of engaging activities tend to perform better on memory tests and have a lower risk of developing dementia than people who are not involved in many types of activities.

What does this mean for me? You can keep your brain engaged by doing activities that are challenging and interesting, and doing them frequently. Variety is important, so choose different kinds of activities.

How do I apply this in my daily life? Aim to participate in at least two activities every day that make you think hard, learn something new, solve problems, or think differently about something. Be sure to choose activities that you enjoy so you will keep at them, such as reading a magazine, volunteering, or trying a different grocery store.

Recommended Resources and Activities:

- The [Memory and Aging Program™](#)
- Try out the 'Rate Your Own Cognitive Engagement' activity handout on page 2

Adapted from Troyer, A.K. & Vander Morris, S. (2012). Memory and Aging Program: Participant workbook. Baycrest Centre for Geriatric Care, Toronto. Available from the [e-store](#).

Rate your own Cognitive Engagement

Below are some examples of cognitively engaging activities. For each activity that you participated in last week, record the number of times you did each activity.

	Worked at a paid job
	Worked as a volunteer
	Played a strategy game like bridge or chess
	Played a word game like crosswords
	Played a number game like Sudoku
	Read a book or magazine
	Wrote in a journal
	Wrote an essay, poem, or short story
	Travelled to a new place or visited a new place in your city
	Took photographs

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Cognitive Engagement cont'd

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Took a new route to a usual destination

Tried a different grocery store

Went to a sporting event

Practiced playing a musical instrument

Rehearsed with a choir

Visited a museum or historic site

Attended a theatre performance, opera, or a public lecture

Visited the library

Hosted a dinner party

Went out with friends

Visited a friend or relative

Participated in a book club

Attended a college course

	Attended a class at a senior centre or recreation centre
	Studied a new language
	Organized photos, or made a scrapbook
	Learned to knit, or tried a new pattern
	Tried a new sport or hobby
	Balanced your chequebook
	Programmed your VCR, PVR, etc.
	Other:
<p>Add up the number of activities you participated in. How close are you to the “12 or more” benchmark? Take a moment and underline a few that you might considering trying out in the future. These are just some ideas to get you started. Feel free to add others as you see fit. The goal is to engage in activities you find challenging, interesting, and most importantly, fun!</p>	