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> 'Intention' to engage brainpower slows mental ageing [...]

## 'Intention' to engage brainpower slows mental ageing process

Attempting crosswords and su doku puzzles to maintain your brainpower could slow down the mental deterioration associated with ageing.

That is the conclusion of research presented by Professor Ken Gilhooly of the University of Hertfordshire to the British Psychological Society's Annual Conference at the City Hall Cardiff on Saturday 1 April 2006.

Professor Gilhooly's study, presented as part of a symposium on problem solving and motivation with age, examined the relationships between cognitive functioning in older people and the levels of mental, physical and social activities they undertook. 145 participants between 70 and 91 years of age were assessed using standard psychometric testing and some novel tests of real life problem solving.

The study found that even when age, gender, health and socio-economic status were taken into account, those regularly undertaking mentally stimulating activities showed higher levels of cognitive ability. By contrast, taking part in social and physical activities did not appear to have the same benefits. Furthermore, the effects of mental deterioration were reduced among those participants who undertook activities with the intention of giving their grey matter a good workout.

"The research suggests that it may be possible to slow down cognitive ageing by deliberately engaging in mentally demanding activities", said Professor Gilhooly. "These results are consistent with the 'use it or lose it' view of the role of mental activity and suggest that the intention to maintain brainpower is likely to be important as the activities themselves."

The symposium also looked at the subject of how older people outperform younger people on the planning of future real life actions, such as errands. As Dr Louise Phillips and Dr Matthias Kliegel showed, making the tasks less 'real life' reverses this phenomenon, so that younger people started to outperform their older counterparts as the tasks became progressively more abstract.

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