

Physical Activity Benefits Brain Function

(NAPS)—Cognitive health—or brain health—is on everyone’s mind. According to a recent national survey by Research! America, adults worry more about losing their mental capacity than their physical ability.

Conventional wisdom says that mind-engaging activities, such as working through crossword puzzles, may decrease the risk of brain disease and dementia, but researchers are still working to find the full evidence.

“We want to target the activities that people identify as appealing, such as playing games and staying involved, and then find out what works for brain health and what doesn’t,” said Susan Ivey, M.D., of the University of California at Berkeley Prevention Research Center (PRC).

The PRC Program, a network of 37 academic centers funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), supports a Healthy Aging Research Network (HAN) consisting of researchers at seven PRCs across the country. The HAN focuses on the health needs of older adults, including factors that promote brain health.

In one project, HAN members asked more than 600 people in nine states what they believed about brain health and how they thought it could be maintained. Now, researchers are using this information to craft clear messages about maintaining a healthy mind.

“People hear about brain health but they find the information confusing or conflicting,” says Daniela Friedman, Ph.D., of the University of South Carolina PRC. “We need to discover the



Keeping active may help maintain a sharp mind.

best ways to talk about it in different communities.”

So while research continues, people of all ages are encouraged to eat healthy, be physically active and engage in social activities. Researchers emphasize that physical activity benefits both body and brain.

“The best single thing anyone can do for his or her brain is to be as active as possible,” says William Satariano, Ph.D., who leads a study at the Berkeley PRC on how walking contributes to health. “You don’t have to run a marathon. Whatever you can do is good.”

“Exercise also lowers your risk for heart disease and other illnesses,” adds Amy Fiske, Ph.D., of the West Virginia University PRC, where researchers are providing physical activity programs for seniors in rural areas. “The kinds of things that promote brain health are beneficial for everybody.”

For more information on the PRC Program, visit www.cdc.gov/prc.

Healthy Ideas

Conventional wisdom says that mind-engaging activities may decrease the risk of dementia, but researchers are still working to find the full evidence, said Susan Ivey, M.D., of the University of California at Berkeley Prevention Research Center (PRC). For more information on the PRC Program, visit www.cdc.gov/prc.

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