

Active mind may decrease chances of Alzheimer's

Dr. Barbara Ensor is hooked on Sudoku, the challenging 9-by-9 grid Japanese brainteaser seemingly everywhere lately in print and online. The challenge of Sudoku is that a number between one and nine can appear only once on each row, in each column and on each 3-by-3 area.

The doctor realizes the puzzle is a way to exercise her brain. "That is one simple little thing that takes 5-10 minutes out of your day," said Dr. Ensor, part of Stella Maris' medical staff and in private practice.

Although the line of reasoning required to solve the puzzle may be complex, there is nothing difficult about understanding that the brain benefits from exercise.

Research shows, said Dr. Ensor, that people who stay cognitively active do not experience a decline in their cognitive abilities "so that those in retirement who sit back and put up their feet and say, 'I'm not going to do anything,' show a greater decline than those who stay active."

Puzzles, crosswords, reading and word games like Scrabble all provide good workouts for the brain. Games require you to use memory and the ability to learn from each game to do better in the next. Physical exercise, like walking or riding a bike, also provides good aerobics for the brain, said the doctor who primarily works with the elderly.

More ideas from Dr. Ensor on how to exercise your mind include:

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