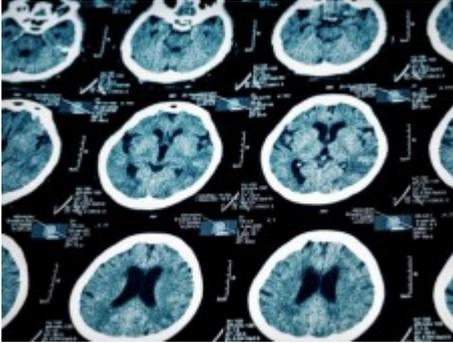


Are you wasting time and money on ineffective solutions for cognitive decline?

By ACSH Staff — May 13, 2015



In yesterday's *New York Times Well Column* [\[1\]](#), Jane E. Brody

discusses memory and cognitive aging solutions and the science (or lack thereof) behind them. There are a variety of these remedies and devices currently on the market, ranging from all-natural herbal supplements to crosswords, Sudoku, and other puzzles.

However, there isn't a lot of proof behind their effectiveness. Brody writes, Unfortunately, few such potions and gizmos have been proven to have a meaningful, sustainable benefit beyond lining the pockets of their sellers. Before you invest in them, you'd be wise to look for well-designed, placebo-controlled studies that attest to their ability to promote a youthful memory and other cognitive functions.

It isn't surprising that herbal supplements are basically useless. However, widely-acclaimed mind exercises such as crossword puzzles have also been called into question. Some evidence exists that doing such activities may help delay memory decline, but neuroscientist Molly Wagner of the National Institute on Aging says they're best done for personal pleasure they won't hurt, but they don't necessarily seem to help, either.

There is some research-based evidence that certain computer games may help improve cognitive abilities in the elderly. Brody writes about a game called NeuroRacer, which requires players to steer a car with their left thumb while watching for signs and obstacles that need to be avoided with their right hand. In a [study](#) [\[2\]](#), published in *Nature*, participants aged 60-85 who trained with the game for four weeks improved their ability to focus well enough to outscore untrained 20-year-olds, and the training effects transferred to other cognitive skills that typically decline with age, including sustained attention and working memory.

Another plus is that older people did not have to be technologically savvy in order to successfully complete or benefit from training, and participants also enjoyed the computer games. However, Dr. Adam Gazzaley, an author of the study, cautioned that videogames are not a guaranteed panacea for cognitive decline. Indeed, researchers have called for more and larger randomized controlled

trials to confirm the benefits of computer programs for cognitive decline.

The Institute of Medicine has warned against falling for poorly tested anti-aging products. In order to avoid being scammed, Brody writes that consumers should ask: Was the product shown to improve performance on real-world tasks ? Are the claims supported by high-quality research that has been independently verified ? And, most important, how do the supposed benefits compare with those from actions like physical activity and social and intellectual engagement?

ACSH's Dr. Josh Bloom, a frequent and vocal critic of the supplement industry says, "you swallow these supplements and do a crossword puzzle, or swallow the puzzle. Probably doesn't make a bit of difference either way.

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Links

[1] <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/05/11/for-aging-effects-more-solutions-than-proof-of-success/>

[2] http://gazzaleylab.ucsf.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Anguera_Nature_2013-Video-game-training-enhances-cognitive-control-in-older-adults.pdf