

Being a Lifelong Bookworm May Keep You Sharp in Old Age

August 02, 2013

Smithsonian Magazine:

To keep their bodies running at peak performance, people often hit the gym, pounding away at the treadmill to strengthen muscles and build endurance. This dedication has enormous benefits—being in shape now means warding off a host of diseases when you get older. But does the brain work in the same way? That is, can doing mental exercises help your mind stay just as sharp in old age?

Experts say it's possible. As a corollary to working out, people have begun joining brain gyms to flex their mental muscles. For a monthly fee of around \$15, websites like Lumosity.com and MyBrainTrainer.com promise to enhance memory, attention and other mental processes through a series of games and brain teasers. Such ready-made mind exercises are an alluring route for people who worry about their ticking clock. But there's no need to slap down the money right away—new research suggests the secret to preserving mental agility may lie in simply cracking open a book.

The findings, published online today in *Neurology*, suggest that reading books, writing and engaging in other similar brain-stimulating activities slows down cognitive decline in old age, independent of common age-related neurodegenerative diseases. In particular, people who participated in mentally stimulating activities over their lifetimes, both in young, middle and old age, had a slower rate of decline in memory and other mental capacities than those who did not.

Read the whole story: [*Smithsonian Magazine*](#)