

Can Video Games Fend Off Mental Decline?

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The New York Times:

“You just crashed a little bit,” Adam Gazzaley said.

It was true: I’d slammed my rocket-powered surfboard into an icy riverbank. This was at Gazzaley’s San Francisco lab, in a nook cluttered with multicolored skullcaps and wires that hooked up to an E.E.G. machine. The video game I was playing wasn’t the sort typically pitched at kids or even middle-aged, Gen X gamers. Indeed, its intended users include people over 60 — because the game might just help fend off the mental decline that accompanies aging.

It was awfully hard to play, even for my Call of Duty-toughened brain. Project: Evo, as the game is called, was designed to tax several mental abilities at once. As I maneuvered the surfboard down winding river pathways, I was supposed to avoid hitting the sides, which required what Gazzaley said was “visual-motor tracking.” But I also had to watch out for targets: I was tasked with tapping the screen whenever a red fish jumped out of the water. The game increased in difficulty as I improved, making the river twistier and obliging me to remember turns I’d taken. (These were “working-memory challenges.”) Soon the targets became more confusing — I was trying to tap blue birds and green fish, but the game faked me out by mixing in green birds and blue fish. This was testing my “selective attention,” or how quickly I could assess a situation and react to it.

Read the whole story: [*The New York Times*](#)