

# Active Minds

*A program to sharpen your mind*

**Active Minds Newsletter**

**Issue 1 - December 2006**



**Mental activity and Alzheimer's Disease**



**In this issue, Dr. Michelon tells you about .....**

**Alcohol and Memory**



**Do you want to stay mentally sharp and/or increase your brain power?**

**Do your residents or clients need mental stimulation?**

Contact Dr. Michelon to schedule a group or an individual trial session!

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**(314) 726-5105**

For more info on mental workouts visit:

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## Mental activity and Alzheimer's Disease

### Regular fun delays dementia!

In 2002, Dr. Wilson from the Rush Institute for Healthy Aging published the results of the Religious Order Study. In this study, 801 older Catholic clergy members were examined for 4.5 years. At the beginning of the study, participants were asked about time typically spent in cognitive activities such as viewing TV, listening to radio, reading newspapers, reading magazines, reading books, playing games such as cards, crosswords and other puzzles and going to museums. Twenty cognitive tests were used to measure mental functioning.

Once age, sex and education had been controlled for, the results showed that the risk of developing Alzheimer's Disease decreased as participation in cognitive activities increases. A person who participated in stimulating activities several times a week had 47% less risks of developing Alzheimer's disease than a person participating in such activities only several times a month.

Dr. Wilson concludes that frequent participation in mental activities is protective.

In 2003, Dr. Verghese from the Einstein College of Medicine came to the same conclusion. In the Bronx Study study, 469 people between 75 and 85 years old were followed for 5 years.

Six activities were examined (reading books or newspapers, writing for pleasure, doing crossword puzzles, playing board games or cards, group discussions and playing music). Results showed that reading, playing board games and playing music were associated with a lower risk of dementia.

Findings were robust even after adjustments for age, sex, education, presence of medical illness and baseline cognitive status. Dr. Verghese concluded that leisure activities may increase cognitive reserve, resulting in a delayed onset of dementia.

*Wilson et al. (2002). Journal of the American Medical Association, 287, 742-748.*

*Verghese et al. (2003). New England Journal of Medicine, 348(25), 2508-2516.*

## Alcohol and Memory

### Drinking may not be so bad...

Several studies have shown that too much alcohol is bad for the brain. Repeated exposure to high levels of alcohol can damage tissues in the

brain and is toxic to the brain cells that hold our memories.

But what about light to moderate alcohol intake? You have probably heard that modest alcohol intake can help prevent heart attacks and reduces the risk for strokes. The effects on memory are not as well known: studies show either no effect or protective effects. A study by Galanis in 2000 showed that elderly men who drank up to one alcoholic beverage a day had better memory performance than those who did not drink alcohol at all. However the worst memory scores were achieved by those who drank 4 or more drinks a day.

More recently, in 2002, Huang studied 1800 older adults and showed that light to moderate alcohol intake can lower the risk of Alzheimer's Disease.

Alcohol may benefit the brain the same way it benefits the body: by increasing the levels of good cholesterol, keeping the blood vessels healthy and providing antioxidants.

Note that much more research is needed to understand the effects of alcohol on memory: don't start drinking to avoid memory problems!

*Galanis et al. (2000). American Journal of Public Health, 90, 1254-1259.*

*Huang et al. (2002). Journal of Clinical Epidemiology, 55, 959-964.*