AS SEEN ON TV

APPEARANCE ON INVITATION



Prof. Dr. Othman, students and teacher from Putra Jaya primary school



Prof. Dr. Othman talks about mental well-being and Alzheimer disease

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LOCAL NEWS



NEW STRAITS TIMES TUESDAY, MAY 10, 2011

Spring-clean your mind

Scientists say memory lapses can be blamed on too much irrelevant information,

IF you struggle to remember names and numbers or frequently fail to follow the plot of a film, help may be at hand.

Scientists say the problem is that you know too much — and you need to declutter, or spring-clean your mind.

Experiments show that the memory lapses that come with age are not simply due to the brain slowing down.

Instead, they can be blamed on the well-used brain finding it more and more difficult to stop irrelevant information interfering with the task at hand.

The first step in the study was to compare the working memory of the young and old. Working memory involves holding information in mind while manipulating it mentally.

Examples include retaining plots of films and books to understand or predict what will happen next and following the thread of a conversation while working out how you can contribute to the topic.

In the context of the study, it involved giving the volunteers groups of sentences and asking them to work out whether each line made sense — and to remember the last word of each senience.

Overall, the younger people, who had an average age of 23, did better, the Quarterly Journal Of Experimental Psychology reports.

The Canadian researchers then did a second experiment to see what was hindering the older volunteers, who had an average age of 67.

This involved being shown pictures of eight animals and being asked to memorise the order in which the creatures appeared.

The volunteers were then shown dozens of the pictures and asked to click on their computer mouse when the first animal in their memorised sequence occurred, then the second and so on.

The older adults found it more difficult to progress, suggesting the previous picture was stuck in their mind.

Mervin Blair, of Montreal's Concordia University, says: "We found that the older adults had more difficulty in getting rid of previous information. We also found that that accounted for a lot of the working memory problems seen in the study."

A third study confirmed that the memory problems were not due to a simple slowing down of the mind.

Blair, a PhD candidate, says that the older mind appears to have trouble suppressing irrelevant information. This makes it more difficult to concentrate on the here and now.

For those who have trouble remembering, he suggests relaxation exercises to declutter the mind.

"Reduce clutter, if you don't, you may not get anything done."

Keeping the mind young through learning a language or musical instrument can also help.

He added that younger people can also fall foul of memory lapses caused by a failure to suppress extraneous information, with sleepless nights making it harder for the brain to function properly.

Previous research found that the part of the brain that keeps embarrassing thoughts in check also weakens with age, leading to people losing some of their inhibitions.

In other words, outspoken old people aren't being rude, they just can't hold their tongues. — Daily Mail

HOW TO DECLUTTER

- Get a good night's sleep
- Take up meditation or yoga to calm the mind
- Learn a language or musical instrument to keep the mind young
- Do crossword puzzles to keep the brain active
- Exercise for a healthy mind as well as a healthy body
- Socialise to keep the mind sharp

You can keep your mind young by learning a language or musical instrument

Reversing memory loss



A TEAM of US scientists say a chemical substance in the brain that slows down the rate of neuron activity is the source of forgetfulness in elderly people.

Their findings, which have been published in the journal *Nature*, show that treatments may be developed one day to reverse the process.

Tests with elderly people are already in the planning.

Older brains have weaker connections between their neurons. Additionally, the neurons themselves are slower to fire signals.

Amy Arnsten and her team of colleagues from Yale University School of Medicine say this leads to forgetfulness in seniors.

The scientists are the first to have carried out research into age-induced change in nerve cells in the frontal area of the cerebral cortex, which is responsible for the cognitive function of the brain.

These neurons are constantly firing off impulses in order to keep information "fresh" in the memory. This helps you to remember things such as where you last left your car keys.

It's also the basis for abstract thinking, multi-tasking and the suppression of "inappropriate" thoughts. But for this form of "random access memory" to work properly, it must be constantly updated.

Arnsten and her team studied the rate at which neurons fired in laboratory animals. They found that neurons signalled slower in elderly animals but that the frequency could be increased when the neurons' chemical environment was matched to that of a younger animal.

The scientists discovered that the frontal lobes of elderly brains too had a high concentration of what are known as cMAP molecules.

These molecules slow the rate of neuron activity by opening the walls of the nerve cells and allowing electrically charged particles in.

Arnsten and her team believe cMAP blockers could reverse memory loss. The substance, Guanfacine, appears to be an effective cMAP inhibitor and clinical trials with the chemical are in the planning stage. – dpa