

From VOA Learning English, this is As It Is.

Welcome back! I'm Caty Weaver. Getting old is not easy. As we age we seem to slow down physically. Brain processes, like memory, can also weaken. And, as we age, we are also more likely to develop depression and anxiety disorders.

Today we tell you about two ways old people might fight the effects of aging.

First up: video gaming.

Scientists have developed a video game for older adults to help sharpen their memory and attention to details. The researchers say senior citizens who play a "multi-tasking" game experience neurological improvements. Avi Arditti reports.

The game is called NeuroRacer. It was a creation of scientists at the University of California, San Francisco. Players use a hand-held controller to race a car on a video projection screen. Later, another level is added to the game. Signs begin to appear and disappear on part of the video screen. Some signs are important messages connected to the game. But others are unrelated. The players learn to pay attention to the important signs and ignore the others.

The researchers tested more than 170 volunteers of all ages. About 15 people aged 60 to 85 were told to play NeuroRacer three times a week for an hour at a time. The other volunteers received different orders. Some did not play the game at all. Others played it without signs appearing on the screen.

After about a month, the researchers tested the volunteers. They looked at how well the study participants did when the game was just racing the car. They compared it to how the participants did when the second task of reading signs was added.

Adam Gazzaley was the lead investigator. He says there was a striking improvement in multi-tasking ability among the adults who played three times a week.

“Before training, they had a 65 percent drop in performance when they do the two tasks versus one task. After training, they only have a 16 percent drop in performance. And that’s better than the 20 year-olds that had a performance drop in the 27 percent range.”

Adam Gazzaley says there was one especially striking finding. He says the volunteers’ strengthened brain power continued for six months. And he says it was useful in other mental areas, like attentiveness and memory.

“...like sustained attention, which is vigilance, ability to hold your attention to something that’s very boring and respond to it rapidly and accurately, that that improved selectively in this group. And also working memory, their ability to hold something in mind for a short period of time and then be able to respond to it rapidly and accurately...that also improved.”

The researcher says he would not urge senior citizens go buy any one video game currently selling in stores. But he says it is possible some target shooting games could help seniors in ways similar to NeuroRacer. And Mr. Gazzaley says his team is working on developing more video games for people suffering from depression and attention deficit disorder.

I'm Avi Arditti.

You are listening to As It Is from VOA Learning English. I'm Caty Weaver.

Song and dance might be another way to keep the brain and spirit in good shape. Just ask the senior citizens who recently competed at the 13th Annual Senior Talent Show.

Ninety-five-year-old Ching Fen Wang (Chin Fan Waung) waited months for this moment, her daughter says.

“She says that she is little bit nervous, but hopes everything turns out; but, in case something happens, just forgive me, she says. I do the best I can.”

The two women are sitting in a meeting room at a home for the aging in Los Angeles, California. They are waiting for a show to begin.

Ching Fen Wang is playing a love song on a traditional Chinese string instrument. Her family thinks her involvement with music is time well spent.

“Otherwise, if she has spare time, she will (say) ‘Oh! I’m hurt here, hurt there.’ So it kind of moves her mind to the healthy way.”

There are more than 30 performances in this year’s talent competition. The show is open to performers 55 and older who live in the Los Angeles area.

Former professional singers, dancers, comedians and musicians are in the show. Many of them traveled around the world when they were younger. Their performances include many different styles -- American blues music, opera and Broadway show tunes.

Accordianist Oscar Rospide, a native of Argentina, has been performing for almost 70 years using music from Latin and European countries.

“I am very grateful for that competition, not for the reason that I am probably going to win money or something like that, but because it is a chance to share a little bit of music with the people. I think that is one of the best languages in the world.”

The show’s creators say their main goal was the sharing of different cultures. Dolores Petersen is a judge in the competition. She says for many older people the Senior Talent Show is one of the best moments of their year.

“You can tell that they’ve been practicing. They love what they do and they want to expand on it and they want to share!”

Most of the performers say they do not care if they win or lose. They are just happy to share their talent and their cultural traditions and have some fun.

And that's As It Is for today. On As It Is tomorrow:

"Honestly I ask myself that every day, why did I decide to play a guys' sport? But, it just kind of grew on me. And then after I made that first field goal, I just knew that it was my sport."

American football is generally considered an all-male sport. But, several girls have joined their high school football team in Alexandria, Virginia. They do not use the boys' locker room to get ready for games or to clean up after. But they are treated as equal members of the team just the same. Avi Arditti will have that story.

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