



Learning French is good for your Brain!

Did you know that it's been proven that learning a second language can help keep your mind younger? It's true. **Researchers have shown that people who speak a second language can better fend off the effects of an aging mind.**

You'll find here several articles about the benefits of learning a language on the brain:

Speaking More Than One Language Could Prevent Alzheimer's

By Nancy Shute - January 10, 2013

Published on npr.org

“Not so long ago bilingualism was thought to be bad for your brain. But it looks more and more like speaking more than one language could help save you from Alzheimer's disease. The latest evidence from the bilingualism-is-good-for-you crew comes from a neuroscientist at the University of Kentucky College of Medicine in Lexington. To test the idea, he had older people who grew up bilingual do an attention-switching task, a skill that typically fades with age. Earlier research that people bilingual since childhood are better at the high-order thinking called executive function as they age.

Gold found that his bilingual seniors were better at the task, which had them quickly sorting colors and shapes, than their monolingual peers. He then added an extra dimension by sticking the people's heads in scanners to see what was happening inside their brains. The brains of the monolingual seniors were working harder to complete the task, **while the bilingual seniors' brains were much more efficient, more like those of young adults.**

Neuroscientists think that having more reserve brainpower helps compensate for age-related declines in thinking and memory, and may help protect against the losses caused by Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. The study was published in the *Journal of Neuroscience*.

About 20 percent of Americans are bilingual and as many as 60 percent of people in cities like New York grew up speaking two languages

Gold might not be an entirely unbiased observer: He became a fluent bilingual as a child, thanks to the French immersion school he attended in Montreal. He's old enough to remember when speaking two languages was considered a handicap. He recalls a cousin ragging him: "He said, 'You're not going to learn to speak English properly'". Not only is that not true, but bilingualism gives you benefits in what we call executive control."

Gold seldom speaks French now, though he has learned Spanish to talk with his Mexican-born wife and her relatives. His next task is to see if learning a second language in adulthood would give some protective benefit to those of us who missed the chance to be bilingual as children. That, he says, "would be more useful to people."

Why Speaking More than One Language May Delay Alzheimer's

By Meredith Melnick - Feb. 22, 2011

Published on healthland.time.com

“There are many ways in which speaking another language may contribute to a well-lived life. You can talk to a whole lot more of Earth's inhabitants, for one thing. You can also enjoy books, music and films in their original language, and throw a few more “skills” onto your résumé. Now add to that list the findings of new studies suggesting that speaking multiple languages may also help protect cognitive health over the long term.

In a study of 450 Alzheimer's patients, led by Ellen Bialystok, a psychology professor at York University in Toronto, those who were bilingual for most of their lives were able to stave off symptoms of Alzheimer's for four to five years longer than people who spoke only one language. Although the ability to speak two languages didn't prevent the memory-robbing disease, it did delay its symptoms from appearing.

Why? The key may be something called cognitive reserve. Learning and speaking two languages requires the brain to work harder, which helps keep it nimble. It's the same use-it-or-lose-it reasoning that underlies advice to do crossword puzzles and to continue to learn new skills throughout life — the idea is to help the brain create and maintain more neural connections. Brains with more cognitive reserve — and therefore more flexibility and executive control — are thought to be better able to compensate for the loss of neurons associated with Alzheimer's.

Lest bilingual folks start feeling too high and mighty, another new study involving 230 people found that the benefits to memory in elderly adults increased with the number of languages they spoke: those who spoke four or more languages were five times less likely to develop cognitive problems, compared with mere bilinguals. People who spoke three languages were three times less likely to have cognitive problems than people who spoke two. The study will be presented at the American Academy of Neurology's annual meeting in Honolulu in April.

What about those of us who weren't lucky enough to learn two languages in infancy? Experts say there's plenty of reason to be optimistic. **Some of the cognitive benefits of learning another language still apply even when the language is learned in mid-life or later** — and even if you never achieve fluency. The idea is just to keep your brain active.”

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