



Pre-Appointment Decision Box

Mild Problems with Thinking or Memory in Older Adults

How to Maintain Mental Capacity

Certain conditions that affect the brain can cause problems with thinking or memory: for example, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, heart failure, and stroke. Depression and sleep apnea can also cause problems with thinking or memory that resemble those experienced in mild brain diseases. Older adults with brain conditions experience problems in a more significant way than people who are aging without these conditions. They may experience memory loss and difficulties with thinking, problem-solving, or language. When these difficulties are mild, people are often unaware they are affected, and develop mechanisms to compensate for them.

There are several options to help mild problems with thinking or memory. Depending on your priorities, you may or may not decide to make a change. The choice is up to you. These options can cause benefits or harms and it is difficult to predict how they will work for you. We recommend that the decision take into account your values and priorities, and that you share this decision with a healthcare professional.

Consider the following:

1. What is my main health problem?
2. What do I need to do to meet my health goals?
3. Why do I need to do anything?
4. What else do I need to know?



What is most important to you?

SELECT WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU AND LOOK AT THE OPTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH IT.

✓ Choose a single item at a time.

Avoid anxiety to maximize wellness

OPTIONS TO IMPROVE YOUR MENTAL CAPACITY:



Avoid feeling helpless

OPTIONS TO IMPROVE YOUR MENTAL CAPACITY:



Improve my health and well-being

OPTIONS TO IMPROVE YOUR MENTAL CAPACITY:



Avoid making a change if the impacts are uncertain

OPTION TO IMPROVE YOUR MENTAL CAPACITY:



Other:

Options to improve your mental capacity



Brain Exercises

Consists of doing activities and games that stimulate mental capacity, e.g., reading, crosswords, sudoku. These activities can either be done individually, or in a group under the supervision of a professional.

BENEFITS: Improved mental capacity, improved short-term memory.

HARMS: Some may experience increased anxiety if exercises are done in a group setting.

PRACTICAL ISSUES: Brain exercises can be done individually at home with limited costs. Supervised brain exercises can be accessed through local community health and services centers, or hospitals, but they may require an external referral from an attending physician. There may be a waiting list to access these services. Private clinics allow easier access. In private memory clinics, costs are about \$155 per hour.



Brain Exercises on the Computer

Consists of using the computer to do activities and games to stimulate mental capacity (e.g. video games). The computer can provide real-time performance feedback and can adjust to the person's ability level.

BENEFITS: Increased mental capacity.

HARMS: Increased anxiety around using unfamiliar technology.

PRACTICAL ISSUES: Computer-based brain exercises require access to a computer. The programs may also need to be purchased. The costs vary depending on the program.



Physical Activity Tailored to Older Adults

Physical activity programs can be adapted to older adults. They may include walking, water exercises, balance or flexibility exercises, and weight training. They can be done individually at home or with other people. The activities should make you feel warm, and make you breathe harder.

BENEFITS: Increased mental capacity, improved fitness and bone health, improved functional independence and mobility, improved mood and self-esteem, improved sleep, reduced risk of chronic disease and pre-mature death, reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, reduced risk of falls.

HARMS: Physical activity can cause temporary muscle soreness after exercising. It can also cause muscle, bone, and joint problems.

PRACTICAL ISSUES: In general, to experience positive impacts from physical activity, people must be physically active for at least 3 weeks, either for 20 minutes 3 times a week, or for 2 hours once a week. Whatever the duration and frequency of the exercise, it takes time.



Wait and monitor

Waiting and monitoring consists of keeping an eye on your stress levels without undertaking treatment or changing your lifestyle.

BENEFITS: Avoid making a change if impacts are uncertain, avoid the inconvenience associated with support options and time to find solutions on your own.

HARMS: Decreased chance of improving or maintaining mental capacity, increased feelings of helplessness and distress.

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