

# 10 Steps to Increase Your Parent's Mental Agility and Memory

By Leonard J. Hansen

Forget almost everything you have been taught over the years about the aging human brain. Almost 70 years ago, a scientist declared that the [aging brain diminished in memory](#), agility, and functionality while increasing in senility. Without much challenge, this theory was accepted for decades and taught as fact.

In reality, more recent studies have shown that the aging brain can continue to function actively and effectively if we recognize its [needs for nutrition](#), challenge, reducing stress, exercise and more. "Use it or lose it," say authors Alan D. Bragdon and David Gamon, Ph.D., in their book by the same title.

Many of today's older adults have also been influenced by the long-time assumptions that the brain, mind and memory of an older person is a failing process. Therefore, they turn their daily lives to endless viewing of television, unhealthy eating, and increased complaining while also increasing personal stress. They abandon dreams and direction for the future.

## 10 Steps To Improve Mind Function

Here are what doctors and researchers agree are needed for the memory and functioning of your parent's brain.

Games, fun and solutions: Introduce games to your parent -- games that call for thinking and evaluating before action. Playing cards with others can stimulate brain function while also providing sociable times with family members and friends. Puzzles, including crosswords, picture puzzles and word puzzles are great brain stimulants.

Get grandkids involved: Ask them to work on and complete a puzzle or game with grandma or grandpa every day, or every week. When such is accomplished, congratulate both grandparent and grandchild for being a great team. Again, social interaction boosts the benefit of doing fun puzzles.

Start a diary: Suggest to your parent that she or he start a daily diary, and even buy a quality book or binder plus a special pen to start. Share with your parent that he or she has accomplished much over the years that should be shared and recorded from today's memory and thinking. Suggest, too, that the diary include "things or projects I want to do," so to define many positive events and projects for the future. When your parent starts sharing about tomorrow, a lot of [stress and depression](#) should start to disappear.

Focus on nutrition: Proper nutrition is vital, particularly a diet strong in antioxidants. Fresh fruits and vegetables are vital to

provide what other parts of the body or system may now be denying to the brain and its function. Other physical challenges are probably reducing the effectiveness of the immune system; therefore, the addition of all the more antioxidants can definitely benefit the brain and its function. Interestingly, most research endorses coffee and its caffeine ingredient as a benefit to better brain function. And caffeinated teas may be of similar benefit.

Get Mom or Dad to stop smoking: Of course, this will be a challenge. But there are no benefits, but only negative effects to the brain from smoking. Remove the ashtrays and lighters from your parent's quarters. If you do smoke, don't do it when tending to Mom or Dad. Light up somewhere else.

Start walking: Physical exercise and movement is vital to the functioning of the older adult brain and its best functioning. Daily walking, even several times around the block, is something that another family member, even a teenager, can accept as a voluntary assignment. If your parent has current challenges in walking, perhaps 30 minutes each day, then in-home exercises, as simple as standing on one leg for 12 to 20 seconds and shifting to the other leg, may be appropriate and effective. The exercise produces aerobic benefits to the brain as well as the lungs, heart and general physical condition.

Invite visitors: Loneliness is a real downer for older adults, particularly if they withdraw from social events or relationships. Invite visitors to visit with Mom or Dad, whether on a one-time or weekly basis. Advise them to not discuss the problems of aging but to call on your parent for observations of historic times and events, current events, particularly because of their knowledge of the past and, importantly, about what your parent wants to do or accomplish tomorrow, next month or even years in the future.

Keep them laughing: There's something to be said for the old saying "Laughter is the best medicine." The act of laughing has been proven to have health benefits. If your parent is isolated a lot, movies and books can provide entertainment. Both Netflix.com and blockbuster.com enable you or your parent to order movies online and they will be delivered directly to the home – no need to run out to the video store. In considering the best movies, start with selections from the 1920s and great films by Charlie Chaplin or Buster Keaton. Also include the great international films by Jacques Tati and Jules Dassin, to the outrageous concerts by Victor Borge. These films may represent points of importance in times past for your parent. Viewing the films give a comedic high while also helping to clobber depression and its negative side effects.

Get out of the house: At least once each week, go somewhere with your parent. It may to a restaurant or bistro for a meal, a visit to a fair, entertainment or special event in your region or, even to something as simple as lunch at the at the senior center. This continues to open the world to your parent, while ensuring that he or she is still part of it.

Recognize your parent for his or her gains: This is a scary time for most older adults. When they were working or being active in the community, your parents felt respected and important. In older age, that sense of acceptance or identification is often lost. Try to get them involved in volunteering, where they can re-gain that sense of accomplishment. Additionally, praise your parent for even small accomplishments and recognize each success.

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Leonard J. Hansen is the nation's pioneer in writing and editing to, for and about mature adults. He has received 106 professional awards and fellowships for his creative work. Access his website at [www.lenhansen.com](http://www.lenhansen.com).

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