

Cognitive stimulation beneficial in dementia

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Cognitive stimulation therapies have beneficial effects on memory and thinking in people with dementia, according to a systematic review by Cochrane researchers. Despite concerns that cognitive improvements may not be matched by improvements in quality of life, the review also found positive effects for well-being.

There is a general belief that activities that stimulate the mind help to slow its decline in people with dementia. Cognitive stimulation provides people with dementia with activities intended to stimulate thinking, memory and [social interaction](#), in order to delay the worsening of dementia symptoms. In 2011, the World Alzheimer's Report recommended that cognitive stimulation should be routinely offered to people with early stage dementia. However, increased interest in its use in dementia in recent years has provoked concern about its effectiveness and potential negative effects on well-being.

The review, published in The [Cochrane Library](#), included 15 [randomised controlled trials](#) involving 718 people with mild to moderate dementia, mainly in the form of Alzheimer's disease or [vascular dementia](#). Participants were treated in small groups and involved in different activities, from discussions and word games to music and baking. All activities were designed to stimulate thinking and memory. Improvements were weighed against those seen without treatment, with "standard treatments", which could include medicine, day care or visits from community [mental health workers](#), or in some cases alternative activities such as watching TV and physical therapy.

"The most striking findings in this review are those related to the positive effects of cognitive stimulation on performance in [cognitive tests](#)," said lead author, Bob Woods, of the Dementia Services Development Centre Wales, at Bangor University in Bangor, UK. "These findings are perhaps the most consistent yet for [psychological interventions](#) in people with dementia."

Those who received cognitive stimulation interventions scored significantly higher in cognitive function tests, which measure improvements in memory and thinking. These benefits were still being seen one to three months after treatment. In addition, positive effects on social interaction, communication and quality of life or well-being were observed in a smaller number of the trials, based on self-reported or carer-reported measures.

In one trial, family members were trained to deliver cognitive stimulation on a one-to-one basis, with no additional strain or burden on caregivers reported. "Involving family caregivers in the delivery of cognitive stimulation is an interesting development and deserving of further attention," said Woods.

Provided by Wiley

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