Dr. Rob’s Science Connection -- Enhancing Brain Health

## Maximizing Memory Ability in Older Adulthood

## Issue 1

Maximizing one’s memory ability in middle and older adulthood requires a multifaceted approach. In this short article, I will summarize recent research showing how we can maximize our memory ability. Any one suggestion won’t have a huge impact, but all together they could have a very significant effect on not only your memory ability but also your quality of life.

It turns out that about 50% of our memory ability and our chance of developing dementia is determined by genetics. So, I hope you chose your parents well, as there isn’t much we can do about our genetic make-up. But the good news is that we can largely control the other 50% that is non-genetic.

If you want to maximize your memory ability in adulthood, research shows we need to engage in the following behaviors:

1. **Get adequate physical exercise.** This includes aerobic activity such as walking and other activities that increase heart rate. This also includes strength or resistance training, such as lifting weights. The effects of resistance training are just now being understood, with a 2012 study showing it could lead to significant improvement in attention and concentration for people who were experiencing mild cognitive and memory problems.

2. **Get adequate cognitive exercise.** We have all heard of the concept *Use It Or Lose It*, and there is a lot of research that supports that idea. We should never stop learning and challenging ourselves. Cognitive stimulation comes in many forms, we can volunteer, fully engage our hobbies, travel, learn new skills, and engage in targeted cognitive activities. There are even some excellent website and iPads apps that can help people get targeted brain exercise.

3. **Watch weight, diet, and glucose levels.** Controlling weight, avoiding diabetes, and eating right could dramatically reduce the chance of having cognitive problems. There is some evidence that eating fish or a fish oil supplement can reduce one’s chance of developing dementia.

4. **Stay socially engaged.** Social engagement is very cognitively stimulating and is associated with a reduced likelihood of developing dementia.

5. **Sleep well.** Poor sleep quality and quantity can impair brain function and result in a number of physical and mental problems.

In subsequent articles, I will explore the above five factors in more detail. Ok, now it is your turn to put these suggestions into practice and take control of your brain health.

Dr. Rob Winningham is a Professor of Psychology and Gerontology at Western Oregon University. For the past 20 years he has researched human memory and ways to enhance cognitive abilities. His brain stimulation activities are used by thousands of retirement communities and have been shown to improve memory ability. For more information go to: [www.robwinningham.com](http://www.robwinningham.com)

*These articles are written for community members to educate them about brain health. The articles can be used in cognitive stimulation classes or in community newsletters. Anyone can use these articles, without requesting permission, as long as Dr. Rob Winningham is given credit. The articles can be reformatted but the text cannot be edited.*