



Name:

Date:

Brain Training

Much research has shown that the human brain is affected by how it is used. This has caused many people to believe that we may be able to make our brain work better by training them. Just as we go to the gym and do physical exercise to make our bodies stronger, perhaps we could do mental exercises to make our brains stronger. In fact, a number of companies now sell computer programs which, they say, allow us to do exactly this, but are such training programs worth spending money on?

Until recently, there has been a lack of proper scientific research into the effectiveness of these programs. In response to this, BBC Lab UK, a British website, decided to carry out a study of the effects of brain training computer programs on overall brainpower. In the study, 13,000 people took part in a six week program in which they did brain training exercises three times a week. At the end, their mental skills were tested by scientists. The conclusion was that, while the participants got better at the particular exercises they did, their overall brainpower did not increase.

Other research, though, shows that these programs can have a beneficial effect on the brains of older people. A recent study carried out by a team at the University of California, Los Angeles, researched the effects of a six month program on 69 people with an average age of 82. These people were asked to play a series of games involving memory, language and mathematics. At the end of the six month program, the participants showed clear signs that their brains were working better.

Associate Professor Michael Valenzuela of the University of Sydney says the evidence so far shows that people under the age of 60 are not likely to benefit from brain training computer programs. Rather, for these people, the most effective method of keeping the brain working properly is to keep the body healthy. Moreover, although such people over 60 is doing a lot of different activities. Valenzuela points out that activities such as meeting people or playing chess, which do not cost money, do as much for the brain as brain training computer programs.



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1. Recently, some companies are selling computer programs that they claim
 - a. give people a way to learn new skills by doing physical exercise.
 - b. train people to be able to perform more effectively at work.
 - c. strengthen people's brains by having them do mental exercises.
 - d. create images of people's brains that show how the brain works.

2. What was the purpose of the research done by BBC, Lab UK?
 - a. To discover why the brainpower of certain participants did not increase.
 - b. To test scientifically how effective brain-training programs actually are.
 - c. To find out which age groups are better at different mental exercises.
 - d. To develop a new way of using computers to help people's thinking skills.

3. How was the study at the University of California, Los Angeles, different from BBC, Lab UK's research?
 - a. It has many more participants than the BBC Lab UK study did.
 - b. It investigated the effects of brain training programs on younger people.
 - c. It tested the memories of people who are good at math and languages.
 - d. It showed that brain training programs help brainpower in some cases.

4. Associate Professor Michael Valenzuela says that
 - a. younger people should use brain training to avoid memory problems later in life.
 - b. people under 60 can best take care of their brains by staying physically healthy.
 - c. people should avoid doing too many activities at once because it can stress the brain.
 - d. older people are less likely to benefit from using computers than younger people are.