

Brain Fitness Games Jolt Stroke Patients' Memory

BY ROXANNA GUILFORD-BLAKE

SAVANNAH, GA. — Regular use of a brain fitness program appears to produce slight memory improvements in elderly participants at 2 months and significant gains at 6 months, compared with an active control group.

Extended exposure is correlated with enhanced visual and verbal memory in the elderly, Karen Miller, Ph.D., of the Uni-

versity of California, Los Angeles, reported at the annual meeting of the American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry.

The program, Dakim BrainFitness, uses games to exercise long- and short-term memory, critical thinking, visuospatial skills, calculation, and language. Dakim sponsored the research, and Dr. Miller serves as a consultant.

The trial included 38 elderly subjects, 22 in the intervention group (average

age, 82.4 years), and 16 subjects in the control group (average age, 83.1 years). The program offers 300-400 activities and five levels of difficulty, allowing participants to engage in different activities each session. Although the program is computer-based, it is designed to be used by those with no computer experience.

Patients with Alzheimer's disease were excluded; those with mild cognitive im-

pairment and age-consistent memory impairment were not.

Significant differences were observed at 6 months after randomization between the intervention group, which was enrolled in the program for the duration of the study (an average of 93.3 sessions per participant) and the control group, which, after a 2-month testing phase, also was enrolled (for an average of 45.2 sessions).

Neuropsychological testing was conducted at baseline, at 2 months, and at 6 months.

After 2 months, preliminary analysis of intervention group subjects revealed better delayed recall for list learning. The intervention group improved by recalling 8.3 words, compared with their initial recall of 7.6 words during baseline testing.

The control group's recall declined to on average 5.3 words during the posttesting period from the initial recall of 6.8 words.

At 6 months, participants in the intervention vs. control groups were significantly different in their delayed mem-

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ory domain score. In the intervention group, which had played for the full 6 months, scores rose from 10.4 at baseline to 12.1.

In the control group, which played from month 2 to month 6, the same memory scores fell slightly, from 10.2 at baseline to 10.1 at follow-up.

The key finding at this point, Miller said, is the importance of exposure. The longer a person uses the program, the more likely he or she is to improve in verbal and visual memory. The results at 2 months were "mild," while those at 6 months were "most overwhelmingly positive," she said in a follow-up interview.

She added that 2- and 6-month analyses of a larger study of 100 subjects, which will include data on perception of memory functioning and mood, should be available by the summer. If she secures additional funding, she plans to do a follow-up at years 1 and 5.

Numerous brain fitness products are on the market, and that prompted a question from the audience about how to separate the legitimate programs from the "Elmer Gantries." Another session panelist, Dr. Gary Small also of the University of California, Los Angeles, fielded the question and suggested that the program should be viewed with the same kind of skepticism that should taken toward nutritional supplements. "We need more evidence before we get all excited about it," he said.

Dr. Small is a Dakim shareholder. ■

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