

*My mother-in-law, who is in her 80s, plays bridge several times a week. She says playing cards keeps her mind sharp and active. For instance, she still does her own tax return and offers to do mine, and she does all of the calculations in her head faster than many others can.*

# Keep the mind playing

By Audrey Miller, MSW, RSW, CCRC

*Playing games facilitates a greater level of independence and social interaction and maintains or improves physical and emotional well-being.*

Playing cards or board games is a wonderful way to keep occupied and active and to keep your mind sharp. In a study conducted at the Rush Alzheimer's Disease Center and Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke's Medical Center, scientists discovered that more frequent participation in cognitively stimulating activities is associated with a reduced risk of Alzheimer disease (AD). In fact, on a scale measuring cognitive activity, a one-point increase corresponded to a 33 per cent reduction in the risk of AD.

"We are asked constantly about this use-it-or-lose-it approach to maintaining memory," said Elisabeth Koss, PhD, Assistant Director of the National Institute on Aging's Alzheimer's Disease Centers Program. "This study provides important new evidence that there may be something to the notion of increased cognitive activity and reduced risk of Alzheimer disease. Further research should help sort out whether cognitive activities can be prescribed to reduce risk of AD...."

In a study in the June 19, 2003, *New England Journal*

*of Medicine*, researchers tracked 469 people aged 75 to 85 for up to 21 years. None had dementia at the start. People who participated the most in leisure activities—including dancing, reading, and playing board games or musical instruments—had a 63 per cent lower risk of being diagnosed with dementia.

So what does playing games have to do with rehab? Everything! My work with individuals has always been to help minimize their disability and maximize their function.

Playing games facilitates a greater level of independence and social interaction and maintains or improves the physical and emotional well-being of an older adult. Playing cards is an ageless activity, one that can be enjoyed inter-generationally. And thanks to the Internet, the activity can be played by people who live in different time zones. How's that for keeping active while not even taking off your slippers!

Modifications can easily be designed for individuals with special needs. Larger-font cards and special card holders (for those with limited finger control) are available. Contact your local Canadian National Institute for the Blind branch and other speciality stores for prices and models.

Go fish, anyone? ●

*Audrey Miller, MSW, RSW, CCRC, is the Managing Director of Elder Caring Inc. She can be reached at [amiller@eldercaring.ca](mailto:amiller@eldercaring.ca).*

