

#LIFESTYLE

Games, puzzles to slow down cognitive decline

A few studies have found that activities such as putting together jigsaw puzzles can protect against cognitive aging



A new study suggests that older people with mild cognitive impairment who engage in high levels of activities such as word games and puzzles have better memory, working memory, attention, and processing speed than those who do not.

The aging process can lead to diminished cognitive functioning for older adults. In addition, about 10% of people previously diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment develop Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia every year.

Although a few studies have found that activities such as putting together jigsaw puzzles can protect against cognitive aging, the benefits of these activities in preventing or postponing cognitive decline are still largely unknown.

"Today, nearly six million people in the United States have dementia, and this number is projected to grow to about 14 million by 2060 with minority populations affected the most," says Junhyoung "Paul" Kim, an associate professor of health behavior at Texas A&M University. "We sought to help fill the gap in our understanding of cognitive decline."

For the study in the Journal of Cognitive Enhancement, researchers analyzed data on 5,932 people who were at least 50 years old in 2012, had mild cognitive impairment and were part of the Health and Retirement Study (HRS) from 2012 to 2020.

The HRS collects data through self-reported paper-and-pencil surveys and in-depth phone interviews. For this study, the researchers analyzed the answers to seven

questions about how often participants engaged in cognitively stimulating activities such as reading, game playing, and hobbies.

Next, they divided the participation levels in the categories of low, mid, and high based on criteria used in previous studies and conducted repeated-measured multivariate analysis of covariates.

"In short, the high-level participation group consistently exhibited higher cognitive function levels during the study period and maintained a similar level of cognitive functions compared to the other groups," Kim says.

Those in the high-level category had higher levels of memory, working memory, and attention and processing speed than those in the mid- and low-level groups. In addition, those in the mid-level category had higher levels of working memory and attention and processing speed than those in the low-level participation group.

"We also found significant differences in all three cognitive functions between years with a declining slope, but the differences between 2014 and the other years of the data set that were examined were not significant," Kim says.

Kim and the others are hopeful that these findings will lead health care providers to recommend that older people with mild cognitive impairment play games, read, or engage in similarly stimulating activities at least three to four times a week.

"In addition, we hope that barriers to doing this, such as inadequate caregiver support and financial constraints, could be overcome through stronger public care services and community support networks," Kim says.



You Can Cook On stones

On his travels around Kerala, chef Regi Mathews of Kappa Chakka Kandhari met a tribal settlement in Agasthiyar Forest near Thiruvananthapuram that cooks fish on hot stone slabs sourced from riverbeds. The fish is marinated with local ingredients – wild gooseberries, chillies, among others – and cooked on hot stones between layers of leaves. "Finally three stones are strategically placed on top and a little water is poured in through holes made in the leaves," said Mathew. "This helps create steam that cooks the fish to moist, flaky perfection. Once the fish is cooked through, the stones turn brittle and crumble to the touch." Another tradition Mathew found on his travels was the technique of curing meat by sun drying it on sun-scorched rock.



Yash HSY/Wikimedia Commons



Priyadarshini Chatterjee food and culture writer, based in Kolkata

Even in a country with no dearth of cuisines, Hyderabad food stands out. Its marag and lukhmi are mouth-wateringly delicious. Its breakfast of khichdi-keema can stir the soul, and its biryani is debatably the best in India. But perhaps few dishes from the historic city stoke the imagination as its pathar ka gosht.

To get working, but to his horror, he found his skewers missing from the victuals. Without losing composure, the cook improvised by using a flat slab of stone to grill the meat. The Nizam is said to have liked the stone-grilled kabab so much that it became a recurrent feature on the royal menu.

The tale of the hungry Nizam has all the elements of a good food story: conflict in the kitchen, culinary ingenuity, satisfactory resolution, and perhaps more than a dash of fiction.

Uncovering history
Cooking on stone has been a familiar technique right from the time of the early humans. Across the world, cultures have developed ways that employ hot stones to boil, grill, roast and bake. The two-stone griddle of the Yahgans, for instance, uses two flat stones scorched in fire: one acts as a griddle on which the meat (or other food) is laid and the second the weight with which it is pressed down. The Arabs have roasted

meat on stones in pits called malla for centuries. The Japanese grill meat on a hot stone in a cooking tradition called Ishiyaki, while the Peruvians steam the famous

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pachamanca in an underground oven with red-hot volcanic rocks. At home in India, centuries before the Nizams, the sultans of Malwa were savouring the virtues of stone-cooked meat. Nimatnamah, the 15th-century book of recipes of sultan Ghiyath Shah and his son sultan Nasir Shah, mentions a dish quite like the Hyderabad pathar ka gosht. According to the recipe, meat is cut into tiny pieces, smeared with an assortment of poherbs and cooked on hot stone. The book also features recipes for cooking meat in underground pits, with the aid of

ated with local ingredients - wild gooseberries, chillies, among others - and cooked on hot stones between layers of leaves. "Finally three stones are strategically placed on top and a little water is poured in through holes made in the leaves," said Mathew. "This helps create steam that cooks the fish to moist, flaky perfection. Once the fish is cooked through, the stones turn brittle and crumble to the touch."

Stone cooking has been particularly common among India's indigenous forest communities. In 1832, Henry Harkness, a captain in the Madras Army and secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society, in his report on life in the Nilgiris, documented how members of the Irula tribe parched grains on large stones or rock fragments they first heated by kindling a fire on top. The parched grains would then be ground and kneaded with water to make cakes that were once again baked on heated stones. If a concave stone was found, Harkness informed, the tribe would heat it and fill it with water before adding the ground flour to make porridge.

Islands are known to barbecue meat in a Khidru, which is an earth oven lined with smouldering stones, wrote JC Dagar and HC Dagar in Ethnobotany of Aborigines of Andaman-Nicobar Islands. The tribes dig a pit and inside it place stones on burning firewood. When the stones are hot, some of them are removed along with pieces of charcoal. Big leaves (usually of Planchonella Longipetiolatum) are spread out, on which is placed meat (pork or dugong meat), followed by more leaves and heated stones.

Up north, the Punjab District Gazetteer of 1883 mentions a unique breed called kak that was baked by the Biloches of Dera Ghazi Khan district in undivided Punjab. The dough, made of jawar or bajra, was wrapped around glowing hot stones, kept near a fire and turned from time to time. Another way of making the bread was by rolling the stone-stuffed dough balls on heated stone slabs, cooking it inside

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#FOOD



Pathar ka gosht. Credit: Shutterstock/Wikimedia Commons



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World Menopause Day

A s women's health changes so significantly in midlife, World Menopause Day seeks to inform and educate about menopause. From cognitive issues to mood changes, from weight gain to sleeping problems, menopause is much more than just the absence of periods. In fact, the process of transition in menopause typically lasts around seven years, but can be up to fourteen years. Reducing the amount of secrecy and shame of this natural process that happens to half of the world's population, World Menopause Day is a day for women, women communities, health care workers and others to advocate and get involved.



#CULTURE

Myths of the Moon

From ancient myths to modern superstitions, all cultures - even modern ones - tell stories about the moon.

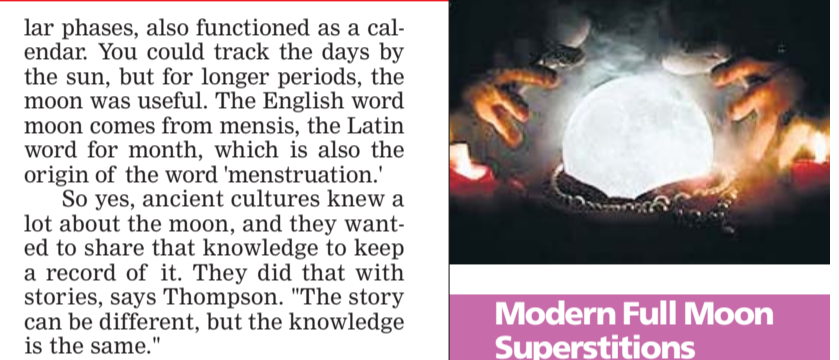
The moon is something all people on Earth, no matter where or when they've lived, have in common. Even modern city dwellers who rarely get a glimpse of the stars (outside a major power outage) can be struck silent with awe at the sudden appearance of the full moon over a nearby building or the reflection of the moon in a puddle of water.

That we all share the moon does not mean that we imagine it the same way however. In our myths and stories, the moon plays many different roles. The mythologies of the moon are as varied as the cultures that create them.



The Moon in Ancient Mythology

The moon is both mysterious and walked on the moon, they understood quite a lot about it. The relationship between the moon and the tides, for example, was clear to early peoples who lived near the sea, explains Tok Thompson, an anthropologist at the University of Southern California who specializes in folklore and mythology. Neither did the connection between fertility and the moon's cycles go unnoticed. The moon, with its regular

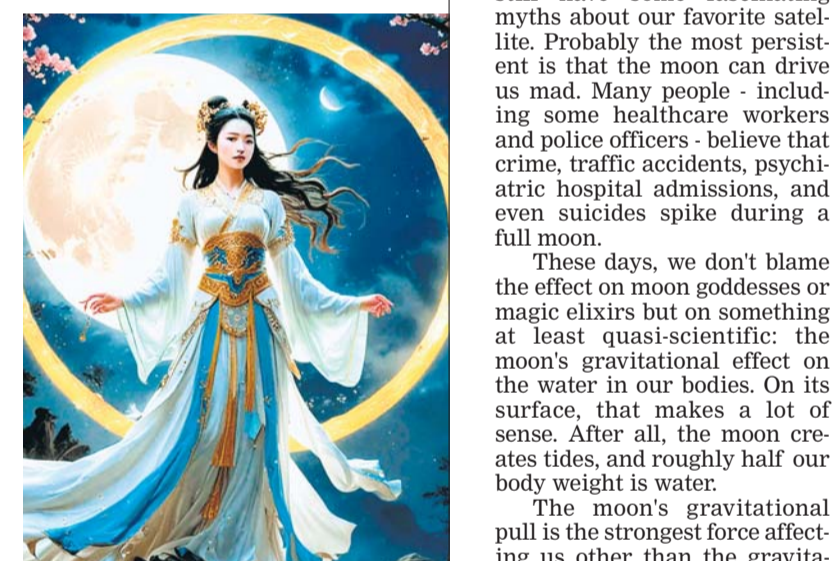


Moon Myths from Around the World

Thompson's favorite myth involving the moon is a creation story from the Tlingit people of the northwest coast of North America. In this story, an old man keeps all the light in the world stashed away in a box. Through wiles that vary from telling to telling, the trickster Raven steals the box and releases the Sun, the moon, and all the stars, bringing light to the world.

In Chinese mythology, a woman named Chang E drank a magic elixir, whereupon she floated all the way to the moon, and there she lives still - with, in some versions, a rabbit. Greek mythology features several goddesses associated with the moon, including Artemis and Hecate. But Selene is the one who represents an embodiment of the moon itself. She makes her nightly travels across the sky in a chariot drawn by two glowing white horses or, in some versions, two white oxen.

Ixchel is a Mayan moon goddess (there are several). She carries a jug of water, occasionally dumping it on Earth, creating rainstorms and floods. As the moon passes through its phases, Ixchel passes through the phases of a woman's life, from maiden to mother to crone.



And indeed, though a few small studies have found some possible effects of the moon on mental health, research over the past decades has not borne this out. For example, a Swiss study published in 2019 looked at almost 18,000 cases of inpatient psychiatric admissions over ten years and found no correlation between the phase of the moon and psychiatric admissions or length of stay.

But perhaps there's a reason we so easily believe that the moon has a powerful effect on our mental health. Pausing to gaze at the moon can create an intense feeling of both awe and peace. Rather than making us mad, the moon might just make

Modern Full Moon Superstitions

But moon myths didn't die out in modern times. We still have some fascinating myths about our favorite satellite. Probably the most persistent is that the moon can drive us mad. Many people - including some healthcare workers and police officers - believe that crime, traffic accidents, psychiatric hospital admissions, and even suicides spike during a full moon.

These days, we don't blame the effect on moon goddesses or magic elixirs but on something at least quasi-scientific: the moon's gravitational effect on the water in our bodies. On its surface, that makes a lot of sense. After all, the moon creates tides, and roughly half our body weight is water.

The moon's gravitational pull is the strongest force affecting us other than the gravitational pull of Earth itself, says Cameron Hummels, a computational astrophysicist and research scientist at Caltech. However, he adds that the gravitational pull of the moon is about 300,000 times weaker than that of Earth. "It's a very, very minute effect," he says.

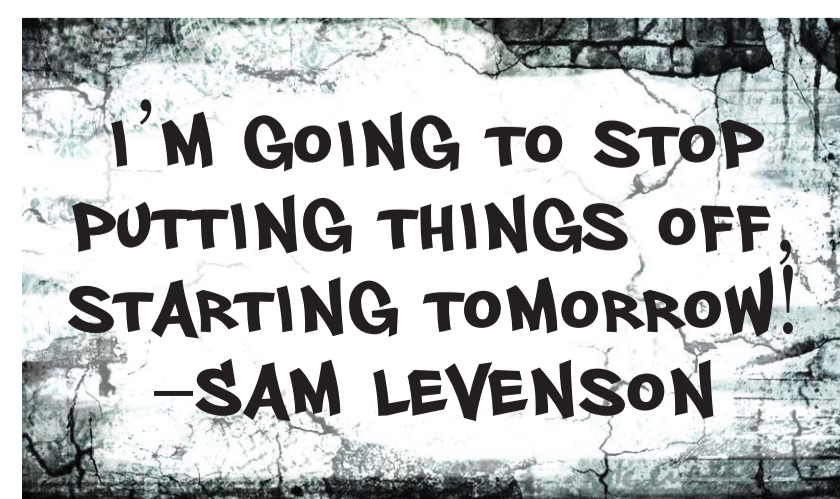
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herbs, is packed into banana leaves along with a scorching hot stone and left to cook under ashes and glowing embers.

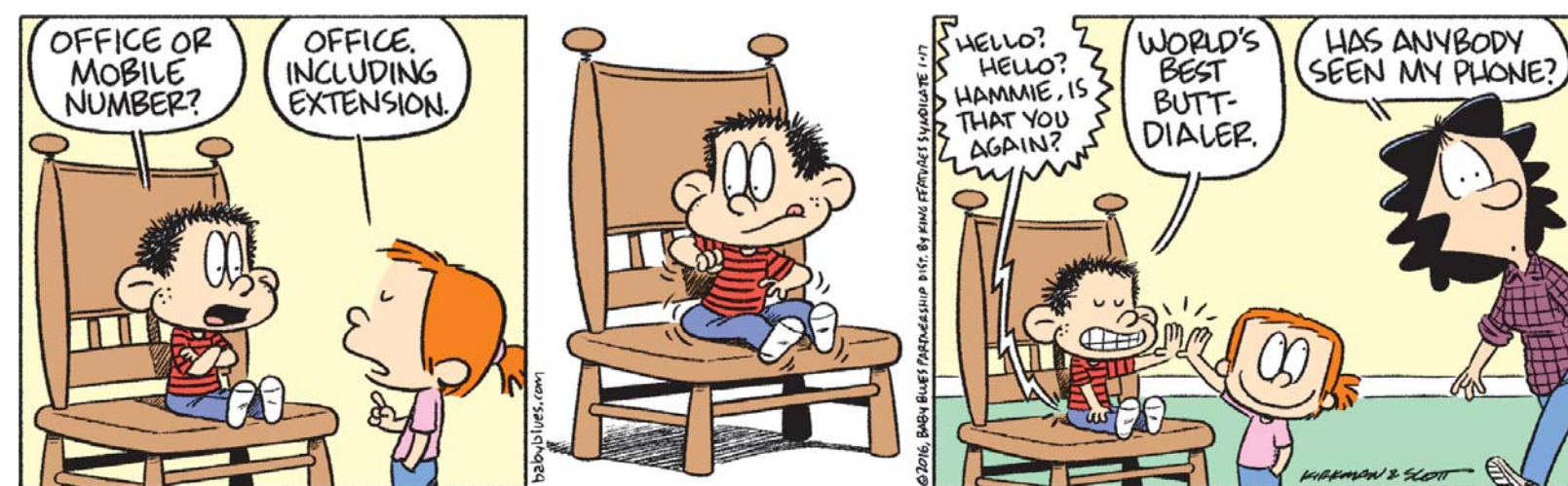


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THE WALL

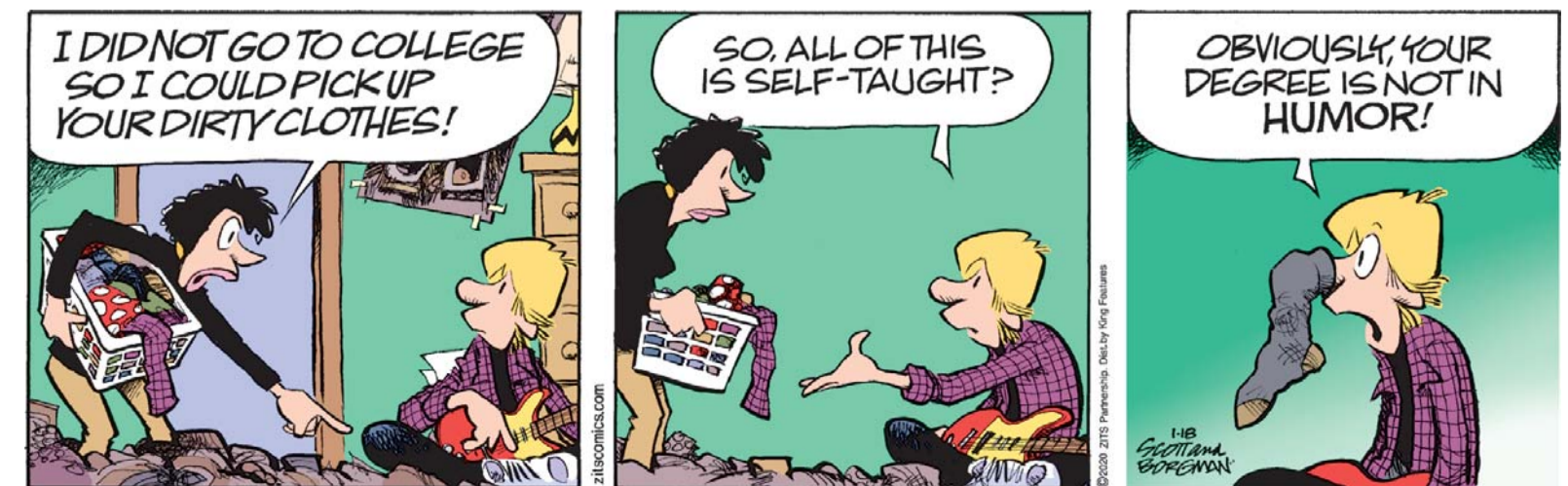


BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman