

# Exercise Your Brain

## Prolong the Effects of Alzheimer's Disease

Michael Raab, M.D., geriatrician at Lee Memory Care, recently came across an article in The Clinical Advisor—a monthly journal relating to primary care medicine—entitled “Cognitive Activity May Speed Dementia.” A physician who works with patients with memory loss, dementia and Alzheimer's disease, Dr. Raab believes the article is very misleading.

“While we cannot prevent Alzheimer's disease or dementia, we can do things to improve memory and brain function,” Dr. Raab says. “We can build up reserves in the brain through exercise—both physical and mental.”

Reserves are important because Alzheimer's disease progresses slowly. Dr. Raab explains reserves through the analogy of a table; building reserves is like adding legs to the table. **The dementia or Alzheimer's disease causes the legs to be lost.** A table with 10 legs—the person who has built reserves—will be able to stand longer, meaning a person can stay at home longer.

“This article leaves that part out,” Dr. Raab says. “It talks about more of a rapid decline toward the end of the disease. When it is probably that the disease is held off longer and then there is a rapid decline at the end. **Going back to the table analogy, all the way down to three legs—the reserves—the table is held upright. But, when there are only two legs—no reserves—remaining, then the table quickly falls over.**”

The idea is that reserves allow a person to live with a better quality of life because they are able to continue living at home with family and friends. Dr. Raab recommends regular exercise of the body and the brain to continue building reserves. “In animal studies, exercise increases the rate of new cell creation in the brain. Two weeks after stopping exercise, the rate decreases and returns to the rate of creation before the exercise started. In short, for body and brain exercise it is true, use it or lose it,” Dr. Raab says.

If you or a loved one is experiencing memory problems, an evaluation can determine which areas of the memory can be improved through exercise, social interaction or, if need be, medication.

The Healthy Brain Initiative of Southwest Florida offers opportunities to boost brain power and fight the onset of memory disorders. Classes are available at various times and locations. Visit [www.LeeMemorial.org/HealthyBrainFL](http://www.LeeMemorial.org/HealthyBrainFL) for more information.

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