

## Preventing future cognitive decline

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Research has shown that future declines in thinking and memory skills may be avoided by taking part in challenging and mentally stimulating activities. These activities help to build what is known as 'cognitive reserve' - the idea that mental enrichment can increase brain complexity, and result in a resistance to the development of cognitive impairment.

A study from MS researchers in the USA has investigated how the concept of cognitive reserve may be relevant to people with MS, especially those at an early stage of illness, who may be in a position to prevent future decline.

Published in the journal [BioMed Central: Neurology](#), this study explored the types of brain reserve-building activities that people with MS undertake, such as physical activity, reading, working, meditation, and doing puzzles.

Much of the earlier research in this field has explored differences in the level of cognitive reserve between people with MS and healthy controls. However, more research was needed to help us understand the causes of these differences, and potential ways that cognitive reserve could be improved.

In this new study, the researchers reported that overall, people with MS were involved in fewer reserve-building activities compared to healthy controls, and this was the case not only for current activity levels, but also for past activities (e.g. activities undertaken in childhood). They found specific differences in the levels of strenuous activity, reading, and work-related activities across different MS subtypes.

The researchers also found that all of the different MS subtypes watched higher levels of television than controls, which is not a reserve-building activity and also reduces the amount of free time available to take part in reserve-building activities.

The study authors suggest that activities to build cognitive reserve can be a simple addition to daily routine. For people who may be interested in looking into this further, an occupational therapist may be able to advise challenging activities best suited to a person's individual circumstances.