



Googling is good for your brain

Whatever your age, googling can chase away the blues, says Norbert Rego

ALL that surfing isn't time wasted, but may actually be good for your brain. Researchers believe that the World Wide Web may help elderly patients fight chronic depression and other illnesses.

Take Savio Sequeira, a 68-year-old architect, for whom medication and counseling was of little help when he sank into a seemingly endless depression. A chance encounter with the Internet, at the prompting of his granddaughter, piqued his interest. It stimulated his intellect and, combined with medication, revived his mood and memory too.

A team from the Centre on Aging at the University of California has found that trawling the Net stimulates brain function more than other activities, such as reading a book. Engaging with technology can have important benefits for mental fitness as it involves complex activity, which keeps the brain ticking, particularly for middle-aged and older adults.

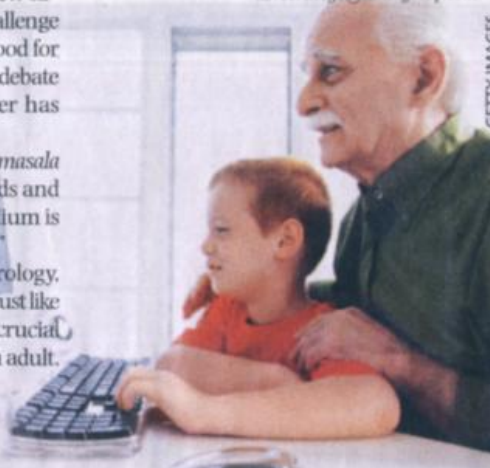
Explains psychiatrist Harish Shetty, Dr LH Hiranandani Hospital, "Curiosity and the urge to challenge one's mental faculties promotes neurogenesis. This could come through reading, writing and watching videos as well. The joy of Googling promotes the yearning to juggle with concepts, stories and narratives, which replenish brain energy and promote new circuits." While Googling helps one challenge existing concepts, it also provides food for new intellectual debates. In fact, the debate lingers on long after the computer has been shut down.

Adds Shetty, "It also provides the *masala* in an alienated world, where friends and colleagues have no time. This medium is interactive and works in real time."

Dr Arun Garg, consultant, neurology, Max Healthcare, New Delhi, states, "Just like reading, writing and arithmetic are crucial for a child, in the mature brain of an adult, the words 'regrow, rewire and re-train' play an important role."

He adds, "The capacity of spontaneous repair is limited in adult brains due to the paucity of stem cells. In elderly patients, degeneration of nerves is compensated by regeneration of the idle ones." So, surf away... it's just what the doctor ordered!

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