

Daily News

dailynews.com

**EQUILIBRIUM and
Barbara Schwartz, M.A.**
Making Front Page News

© 2007, Los Angeles Daily News

MONDAY, JANUARY 8, 2007

50 CENTS
REGISTRATION AREA

Baby boomers try to use their heads

BY DANA BARTHOLOMEW
Staff Writer

Feng shui master Judy Famiglietti did yoga, practiced Pilates, sought Reiki massage and meditated 15 minutes a day. But the svelte baby boomer from Sherman Oaks wasn't content to be just fit and calm. Fuzzy thinking meant she needed mental workouts, too.

"I used to forget lists at the grocery store," Famiglietti said during a Brain Gym 101 session conducted by Barbara

TAKE OUR ONLINE POLL

yes

no

Do you think brains can be improved by mental exercises?

go to dailynews.com to vote

Schwartz at Equilibrium in Encino.

"In my family, we're really obsessed with being fit, mentally and physically. Perfection is high on the list ... and I have

sharpened my mental abilities."

It's no longer enough for middle-age Angelinos to tone their bodies. Botox their brows and toss out the trans fats in their quest for vitality.

Across the nation, those born in the 20 years after World War II are popularizing everything from "brain-healthy" foods to virtual brain gyms in an effort to retain their cognitive edge and stave off dementia.

PLEASE SEE BRAIN / PAGE 8



Dr. Gary W. Small, a UCLA geriatric psychiatry professor, holds Brain Games, computer brain exercises he developed. Michael Owen Baker/Staff Photographer

BRAIN: GAME Puzzles, reading sharpen skills

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"We're baby boomers, and we don't want it to happen to us," said Sheryle Bolton, chief executive officer of Qixit Inc., of Oakland, whose HappyNeuron.com launched last fall.

"We started the fitness craze. We've learned a lot about nutrition. And now it's time to learn about mental exercise."

Nintendo's Brain Age video game, for instance, offers math-and-word challenges, while California-based Web sites such as MyBrainTrainer.com and HappyNeuron.com supply cranial calisthenics to a generation that hatched the fitness and nutrition movements.

AARP and other 50-plus advocates offer brain health tips, while the Alzheimer's Association conducts Maintain Your Brain workshops for such corporations as Lockheed Martin and Apple Computer.

Brain health has even become the darling of health insurers.

MetLife offers a 61-page booklet called "Love Your Brain," while Humana plans to offer brain fitness software to millions of gray-haired clients.

With Americans now living longer and the first wave of the 78 million baby boomers approaching 60, many hope such noggin-builders will ward off memory problems.

"The difficult fact to face is that baby boomers are getting older at the same time," said Barbara Green, spokeswoman for the Alzheimer's Association of California Southland.

"It is going to have a catastrophic effect if we don't make some progress in solving the problem of Alzheimer's disease."

Millions affected

The degenerative brain disease affects an estimated 4.5 million Americans — more than double the number in 1980 — including one in 10 persons older than 65 and nearly half of those older than 85.

Research has shown that an estimated 40 percent of those 65 and older have some level of age-associated memory loss.

Without a cure, up to 16 million Americans are expected to suffer from Alzheimer's by mid-century, according to the Alzheimer's Association.

For overall brain health, AARP and health experts recommend regular exercise, staying mentally active and eating a balanced diet rich in antioxidants and omega-3 fatty acids.

To determine whether brain exercise can actually ward off flabby minds, dozens of studies are in the works. However, there already is growing evidence that it does.

Previous studies have shown that animals kept in cages full of toys had better memories and



Brain Gym instructor Barbara Schwartz, top, helps client Judy Famiglietti release emotional stress and sharpen the mind during a session at Schwartz's home in Encino.

more brain cells than those housed in more mundane environments.

And research has long shown that mental exercise in people can improve test scores while crossword puzzles and reading can keep the mind sharp.

A new study suggests that brain exercise strengthens the ability of seniors to think more clearly and to perform everyday tasks needed to live independently.

Healthy seniors with only 10 hours of classes to improve their reasoning reported significantly less trouble with cooking, shopping and other routine activities.

The study, published Dec. 20 in the Journal of the American Medical Association, showed that cognitive training still brought benefits five years later.

"There is mounting evidence that cognitive exercise may protect our brains," said Dr. Gary W. Small, a professor of geriatric psychiatry and director of the UCLA Center on Aging and the Memory & Aging Research Center.

"We know specific exercises in certain brain functions definitely have an effect. The question is, if you do your mental aerobics, will brain exercise stave off Alzheimer's?"

"There is softer evidence that it does."

Small, whose five-week Senior Memory Training courses at UCLA Center on Aging have drawn baby boomers to teaching sites across Los Angeles, has licensed it in a half-dozen states.

He has also designed Brain Games, a handheld computer

game scheduled to be released this month by Mattel.

Last year, Small led a UCLA study that found people could improve brain function and efficiency with only two weeks of memory exercises, along with healthy eating, physical fitness and stress reduction.

The study, published in the June issue of the American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry, centered on ages 35 to 69.

"There is definitely something to this," Small said. "We found that in a matter of two weeks, we cannot only improve memory performance, but improve mental efficiency as seen on brain scans."

Entrepreneurs have pursued the boomer brain market with proven success.

In the past year, MyBrainTrainer.com has more than doubled its membership to 7,000 clients, company officials said.

"It's the Nautilus machine for the mind," said Bruce Friedman, the Web site's founder. "It's the ignition for your cognition."

"I definitely believe that more and more boomers are going to be taking these kind of preventive steps to ward off, or at least to ward off, dementia."

Rod Evans, a 57-year-old author and philosophy professor, is an unlikely candidate for more mental stimulation.

He teaches classes at Old Dominion University in Virginia and has written 14 books, including "The Gilded Tongue," a dictionary of "meretricious words guaranteed to impress your friends." He rifles through flash cards daily to improve his word skills. And he plays Boggle, a Scrabble-like game for the brainy.

Keeping fit

To keep fit, he also exercises and lifts weights throughout the week.

But when Evans discovered MyBrainTrainer.com two years ago, he found himself mentally working out up to three times a day online.

"I feel energized," said Evans, of Norfolk, Va., whose family has no known history of dementia. "It helps me wake up. It makes me feel good."

"I want to reduce the possibility, or at the very least, to delay senility."

For the past 20 years, Schwartz has conducted Brain Gym sessions at her Encino home. Founded by Brain Gym International in Ventura, the technique aims to improve the mind through 26 exercises.

During a recent session, Schwartz went through a litany of exercises with Famiglietti, who once stumbled at remembering "peoples' names." She signed up in August for Brain Gym sessions that cost \$125 and up.

"Feel complete?" asked Schwartz, in a room redolent of sweet aromatherapy oils.

"Yeah, I feel much better," said the feng shui consultant whose 80-year-old mother can still whip the most challenging crossword and Sudoku puzzles.

"I'm hoping the DNA will kick in, that the gene pool will stay on my side and that I can preserve what I have with the exercises that I'm doing."

The New York Times News Service contributed to this report.

dana.bartholomew
@dailynews.com
(818) 713-3730

On the Net: For more information on brain health, go to <http://www.aiaa.org>; www.aarp.org; www.aging.ucla.edu; www.mybraintrainer.com; www.happy-neuron.com; www.braingym.org; and www.equilibriumhealing.com.

**"Research has shown
that an estimated 40%
of those 65 and older
have some level of age-
associated memory loss.**

**"Without a cure, up to
16 million Americans are
expected to suffer from
Alzheimer's by mid-century,
according to the
Alzheimer's Association.**

**"To determine whether brain
exercise can actually ward off
flabby minds, dozens of studies
are in the works. However,
there already is growing
evidence that it does."**

Ms. Schwartz has over 25 years of credentialed classroom teaching experience and is an Educational Kinesiologist, Developmental Specialist, a Certified Brain Gym® Instructor, Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome Evaluator and Integrative Healing Techniques Specialist.

After much research and clinical observation, Ms. Schwartz developed a series of Integrative Brain • Body Techniques that allow immediate and measurable improvement, without the risks and known dangers of medical drug treatment.

Equilibrium can provide these safe, proven, drug-free solutions to individuals, families and groups. Ms. Schwartz frequently provides workshops tailored for adults, as well as classroom, home-study, daycare and camp programs for children, and teacher/parent workshops. She also works directly with adults, children and families on a private confidential basis.



EQUILIBRIUM™

Integrative Brain • Body Techniques

For more information contact:
BARBARA SCHWARTZ, M.A.
Integrative Healing Techniques Specialist
800-257-0743 818-345-0743
WWW.EQUILIBRIUMHEALING.COM