

What Keeps You Sharp?

Welcome to the research survey *What Keeps You Sharp?*

What is the survey about?

As we age, we may experience changes in our thinking and memory skills. We do not all experience these changes in the same way though: some of us might retain our thinking skills into later life while others might experience declines.

We are asking adults about their beliefs and attitudes to how their thinking skills might change with age. **You are being asked about your opinions and beliefs in the survey, so it is important to remember there are no right or wrong answers.**

You are eligible to participate if you are over the age of 40 and living in the UK. The survey should take about 15-20 minutes to complete.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The information might help us better communicate with people about what affects thinking skills with age, feed into policy or generate new questions for other research studies to address.

There are no intended risks associated with completing the survey but if you experience any problems, you can withdraw without giving a reason. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

Will my participation be confidential?

The survey is being conducted in compliance with the Data Protection Policy at Heriot-Watt University. Results of this survey will not include your name or any other identifying characteristics. Your answers will not be seen by anyone outside of the research team. If you choose to do so, you can give your email address at the end of the survey to hear more about the findings; this information will not be held with the other data you provide and will not be linked to it in any way.

Where can I get more information?

The survey is led by researchers in The Ageing Lab at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. They are happy to answer any questions you have before or after completing the survey: Dr Ria Vaportzis (phone: 0131 451 8009, email: e.vaportzis@hw.ac.uk) or Dr Alan Gow (phone: 0131 451 8239, email: a.j.gow@hw.ac.uk).

The survey has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the School of Social Sciences at Heriot-Watt University. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you can contact the committee: sls.ethics@hw.ac.uk.

Consent

When you begin the survey, you will be asked to confirm the following statements:

I have read and understood the above information and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the survey.

I agree to take part in this survey and agree for the information I provide to be used for the purpose of it.

I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time.

The survey begins on the next page.

What Keeps You Sharp?

Consent

I have read and understood the information and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the survey. **Yes/No**

I agree to take part in this survey and agree for the information I provide to be used for the purpose of it. **Yes/No**

I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time. **Yes/No**

PART A. HOW THINKING SKILLS CHANGE WITH AGE

First, we are going to ask you some questions about how thinking skills might change with age. When we talk about thinking skills, that can include lots of different things such as your memory or problem solving abilities.

1. Below is a list of thinking skills. We want you to write the age that you think each skill might start to decline. That is, if you think a skill begins to decline about 55 years old, enter 55. You can use any ages you want. You might use the same age a few times or you might have a different age for each skill. If you think the skill never declines, you should write 100 for that option.

Ability to remember things	Starts to decline about age ____
Ability to make decisions	Starts to decline about age ____
Problem-solving skills	Starts to decline about age ____
Ability to focus/pay attention	Starts to decline about age ____
Speed of thinking/being able to react quickly	Starts to decline about age ____
Ability with words	Starts to decline about age ____
Ability with numbers	Starts to decline about age ____
Wisdom and knowledge	Starts to decline about age ____

2. Our lifestyles sometimes affect how healthy we are as we age. Some health outcomes might also be influenced by our genes.

I think that the changes we experience in our thinking skills as we age are (choose what you think might be most likely):

- Entirely determined by our genes**
- Mostly determined by our genes**
- Probably about half determined by our genes and half determined by our lifestyle**
- Mostly determined by our lifestyle**
- Entirely determined by our lifestyle**

3. Do you think there are things people can do to maintain or improve their thinking skills as they grow older?

- Yes, I think there are things people can do to maintain/improve their thinking skills**
- No, I do not think there are things people can do to maintain/improve their thinking skills**
- Not sure**

4. How important do you think each of the following are to maintaining or improving thinking skills as we age?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important
Challenging the mind with games, puzzles, or other activities				
Exercising your body or physical activity				
Taking vitamins or supplements				
Eating a healthy diet				
Getting enough sleep				
Managing stress effectively				
Volunteering or helping others				
Socialising with friends or family				
Watching the news				
Watching educational programmes				
Taking educational classes				
Trying new activities				
Learning new things				
Pursuing hobbies				
Reading				
Having a purpose in life				
Playing a musical instrument or singing				
Engaging in mindful activities such as meditation, yoga or prayer				
Playing games designed for brain training				
Other (Specify)				

5. As we age, some people report their memory getting a bit poorer, or that they slow down when solving problems. Some people see these changes as a normal part of ageing while others think these are early signs of something more serious (for example dementia).

Changes in thinking skills as we age are a sign of something more serious. Do you...

- Strongly agree**
- Agree**
- Neither agree nor disagree**
- Disagree**
- Strongly disagree**

PART B: YOUR OWN THINKING SKILLS

For the next section, we are asking some questions about your own thinking skills. Answer according to what is right for you.

6. How would you rate your thinking skills or mental sharpness?

- Excellent**
- Very good**
- Good**
- Fair**
- Poor**

7. How important do you think it is to maintain or improve your thinking skills as you get older?

- Very important**
- Somewhat important**
- Not very important**
- Not at all important**

8. Do you know how to keep your brain healthy?

- Yes** **No** **Not sure**

9. Do you know someone who has, or had, dementia such as Alzheimer's disease or another condition causing changes in their thinking skills?

- Yes** **No** **Not sure**

10. In the past five years, have the following increased, decreased or stayed the same?

	Increased	Decreased	Stayed the same
Your ability to remember things such as names, dates, directions, etc.			
Your ability to make decisions			
Your problem-solving skills			
Your ability to focus or pay attention			
Your speed of thinking or ability to react quickly			
Your ability with words			
Your ability with numbers			
Your wisdom and knowledge			

11. How concerned are you, if at all, about your thinking skills declining in the future?

Very concerned

Somewhat concerned

Not very concerned

Not at all concerned

12. Below is a list of activities that some people believe might be good for their thinking skills. We want you to tell us which of the following activities you regularly do and which you do because they might be good for your thinking skills. If you do not do the activity, select “Don’t do”.

	Don't do	Regularly do	Do because it is good for your thinking skills
Challenge the mind with games, puzzles or other activities			
Exercise your body or be physically active			
Take vitamins or supplements			
Eat a healthy diet			
Get enough sleep			
Manage stress effectively			
Volunteer or help others			
Socialise with friends or family			
Watch the news			
Watch educational programmes			
Take educational classes			
Try new activities			
Learn new things			
Pursue hobbies			
Read			
Pursue a purpose in life			
Play a musical instrument or singing			
Engage in mindful activities such as meditation, yoga or prayer			
Play games designed for brain training			
Other (Specify)			

13. Suppose you were told that each of the following activities below was shown to maintain or improve thinking skills. How does knowing this encourage you to engage in, or engage more in, the following activities?

	Greatly encourages	Somewhat encourages	Doesn't encourage me much	Doesn't encourage me at all
Play games, puzzles, or other activities that challenge the mind				
Engage in physical activity				
Take vitamins or supplements				
Eat a healthy diet				
Ensure you get adequate sleep				
Try to manage stress effectively				
Volunteer or help others				
Socialise with friends or family				
Watch the news				
Watch educational programmes				
Take educational classes				
Engage in mindful activities such as meditation, yoga, or prayer				

14. To what extent would each of the following situations encourage you to engage in activities to improve your thinking skills?

	To a great extent	To some extent	To no extent
Taking care of, or witnessing someone with declines in thinking skills			
Feeling that your own memory or focus is declining or isn't what it used to be			
Seeing, hearing, or reading about it in the media			
Having a history of decline in thinking skills in your family			
Experiencing a major physical illness or chronic disease related to brain health			
Feeling stressed, overwhelmed, or not coping well			
Having a friend to exercise with			
Reading an article about how a certain activity helps			
Having a doctor or other health care provider suggest it			

15. Which of the following sources do you currently use or would consider using to get advice about maintaining/improving your thinking skills?

	Would not use	Currently use	Would consider using
Doctor or other health care provider			
Family/friends			
Books			
Newspapers, magazines, flyers, or pamphlets			
Radio/TV			
Internet web pages about the topic			
Pharmacist			
Dietitian			
Health food shops			
Social media/discussion boards			
Charities			
Helplines			
Other (Specify)			

16. What would be one piece of advice you would give to someone to maintain or improve their thinking skills with age?

PART C. OVERALL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

The survey has mainly focussed on how thinking skills might change with age. That is a concern for some people but not for others. We therefore have some questions about your health and wellness more generally.

17. Please rank the following from most to least feared aspects of ageing by placing a number in the box next to each of the items in the list below (1 = most feared). If not feared, please leave the item blank.

- Being cared for by strangers _____
- Loss of thinking skills _____
- Not being able to live at home _____
- Isolation _____
- Loss of independence _____
- Physical changes (e.g., wrinkles, grey hair) _____
- Death _____
- Illness _____
- Loss of physical abilities _____
- Death of loved ones _____
- Financial difficulties _____
- Fear of falling or getting hurt _____
- Loneliness _____
- Other _____

18. How would you rate your overall health?

- Excellent**
- Very good**
- Good**
- Fair**
- Poor**

19. When thinking about the next five to 10 years, do you expect your health to:

- Get much better**
- Get somewhat better**
- Stay the same**
- Get somewhat worse**
- Get much worse**

20. How old are you? _____

21. To which gender identity do you most identify?

- Male**
- Female**
- Other** _____

22. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Primary school**
- Some secondary school**
- Secondary school**
- College or other training**
- Professional qualification**
- Undergraduate university degree (Bachelors)**
- Postgraduate university degree (Masters, PhD)**
- Other** _____

23. What is your ethnic group?

White

- English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
 - Irish
 - Gypsy or Irish Traveller
 - Any other White background, please describe
-

Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups

- White and Black Caribbean
 - White and Black African
 - White and Asian
 - Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background, please describe
-

Asian/Asian British

- Indian
 - Pakistani
 - Bangladeshi
 - Chinese
 - Any other Asian background, please describe
-

Black/African/Caribbean/Black British

- African
 - Caribbean
 - Any other Black/African/Caribbean background, please describe
-

Other ethnic group

- Arab
 - Any other ethnic group, please describe
-

If you would like to hear the findings when these are available, please provide an email address and check the relevant option below.

This survey is the first stage of a larger study called *The Intervention Factory*. In the following stage, we will be exploring if various activities can maintain or improve thinking skills in older adults. We will be recruiting participants between 65-75 years, who are located in Edinburgh and the Lothians. If you are interested in participating or you would like to hear more about that study please provide your email address and check the relevant option below. By providing your details just now you are under no obligation to take part. You will receive full details of the next stage and can then decide whether you want to participate.

Email address: _____

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| I would like to hear the findings from this survey | YES/NO |
| I would like to hear more about participating in the next stage | YES/NO |

You can also email us at healthageing@hw.ac.uk or call us at 0131 451 8009. More information can also be found at www.healthyageing.hw.ac.uk.

Thank you for participating in the *What Keeps You Sharp?* survey.

Debrief Form

Thank you again for participating in this survey.

If you have any questions or concerns about your own thinking skills it is important to speak to your GP.

The charity Age UK also provides useful advice and information. The Age UK network covers the whole country and relevant advice can be accessed at:

- Age UK: www.ageuk.org.uk/no-one/we-provide-advice/
An advice line is open 8am to 7pm 365 days a year. To talk to someone, just call 0800 169 2081.
- Age Scotland: http://www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/about-us/silver_line_scotland/
An advice line is open 24 hours a day, every day of the year. To talk to someone, just call 0800 470 8090.
- Age NI: <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland/>
To talk to someone, just call 0808 808 7575.
- Age Cymru: <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/publications/our-information-and-advice/>
An advice line is open Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm. To talk to someone directly in Welsh or English, just call 0800 022 3444.

These details are for any general concerns you might have about your health and wellbeing. Any questions related to the survey should be directed to the research team.

The survey is led by researchers in The Ageing Lab at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. They are happy to answer any questions you have before or after completing the survey: Dr Ria Vaportzis (phone: 0131 451 8009, email: e.vaportzis@hw.ac.uk) or Dr Alan Gow (phone: 0131 451 8239, email: a.j.gow@hw.ac.uk).