



The Cognitive Stimulation in the Academy 50+

The Academy 50+ is a Lifelong Learning Programme of the organisation "VHS-Bildungsinstitut VoG" focused on people over 50 years old. Our participants want to enrich their life with continuing training and to be engaged in something new. They want to keep in shape mentally and physically.

The offer of **the Academy 50** intends to reach the people over 50 years who are still interested in historical, philosophical and social items.

The topics are: Art and culture – History – Health – Philosophy – Actuality – Policy - Art History - Regional geography History of literature - Different study trips - Visit in the Opera of Liege

The Academy 50+ integrates the "Cognitive stimulation" in the lessons, because cognitive activities for the elderly can keep their minds sharp and alert and can delay the onset of age-related dementia.

In the current demographic context, aging and neurodegenerative diseases are well known and very much discussed in the media as they become a very important societal issue. Aging is usually related to decline and losses of various kinds. However, many elderly individuals want to remain physically and cognitively healthy.

The importance of mental exercise:

There are a number of elderly people that never show any signs of an age-related decline in cognitive functions. However, there is a greater number of older seniors that do experience a loss of cognitive skills and abilities to varying degrees. For most of them the decline is part of the aging process caused by the death of brain cells. For others, dementia is the result of an illness or disease such as Alzheimer's Disease, Multiple Sclerosis or Huntington's Disease.

Just as the body needs physical exercise to keep fit, the brain needs mental exercise to stay active and alive. Mental exercise stimulates the brain, often providing long-lasting positive effects regarding thinking and reasoning skills, memory and processing speed.

What are cognitive skills?

The definition of the word cognition means the *process of knowing* and includes all of its aspects, such as:

- Reasoning
- Awareness
- Perception
- Knowledge
- Intuition
- Judgement

Cognitive skills are the mental capabilities that a person has which allow them to process all the information they receive from their five senses. These skills are needed for a person to be able to think, talk, learn or read. They are what give a person the ability to recall things from memory. Cognitive skills also are needed to:

- Analyse the images and sounds their senses perceive.
- Maintain concentration.
- Draw associations from various pieces of information.

There are many types of activities that help to maintain and improve the cognitive skills of older seniors. Some of them involve everyday activities. Other mind-challenging activities include playing games, making crafts and solving puzzles.

Everyday Activities That Strengthen Cognitive Skills

One of the most important cognitive activities for the elderly is engaging and meaningful conversation. Often as people age, they withdraw from social interaction, giving them fewer opportunities to talk to others about things that are important to them. By asking their opinions and advice on situations and events, their minds are stimulated and they experience a feeling of self-worth.