



Get Creative for Your Brain

"If I didn't have my poetry, retirement would be a lot less fun," my older friend Molly told me recently. She's like many of my neighbors: the aspiring artist down the block, the contra dancing couple two streets over, and the gardening widower next door. Their creative outlets provide an ongoing source of focus, fascination, and fun in their lives.

Like so many other seniors, these creative spirits have tapped into the arts as a source of great pleasure and challenge. But finding an outlet in the arts carries another significant benefit as well: Many studies show that learning new things and in new ways helps keep the brain younger and more nimble and, perhaps, less susceptible to dementia and mental decline.

Brain Exercise = Brain Protection

Be sure to choose activities that challenge your brain and give you enjoyment as well. With many mentally stimulating activities, you can start at an easier level and move to more advanced levels as your skills improve. The result is to build new learning into your routine, which is important for adding to your brain reserve. And there are so many options, you are bound to find something that excites and energizes you.

Bountiful Creative Opportunities

Creativity wears many faces and finding the perfect fit is a uniquely personal choice, but you don't have to go it alone. Numerous resources are available that offer guidance, fellowship, and shared effort in creative pursuits. Many of the suggestions below can be found on-line and attended virtually.

You might consider:

- **Poetry and writing group and workshops:** There is a national movement afoot to provide classes, workshops and forums on poetry writing designed for seniors. Local senior centers and public libraries are a great place to find how to join others with an interest in poetry.
- **Painting and drawing classes:** Almost any art gallery, museum, or art association can steer interested seniors to art classes and field trips.
- **Music groups and lessons:** The possibilities are nearly endless. Join your local choir group, take up an instrument, or sign on to the local band or orchestra.
- **Dance and yoga:** Great creative outlets and fabulous exercise to boot. With a little research, you might be able to find a class specifically for seniors.

- **Gardening and floral design:** Most communities have both garden clubs and access to a Cooperative Extension office. It's their mission to help you get involved in the joys of gardening.
- **Community theatre and play reading:** Join your community theater or start a play-reading group with friends.
- **Channel your personal gourmet:** Cooking classes are as close as the local gourmet shop, senior center or adult education program.

And when you find a new creative hobby, who knows what roads it may lead you to?

"There is such satisfaction in feeling that, little by little, you're mastering something difficult and complicated — something that demands time and discipline," says my poetess friend. And she proudly reports that a second of her poems is slated for publication in our local newspaper.