Games designed to sharpen brain skills are projected to be a $3 billion industry by 2015, but some experts are skeptical about their potential to improve memory function during everyday tasks.


Transcript

Can "Brain Training" Make You Smarter?

BRIAN WILLIAMS, anchor:
Perhaps you’ve seen the commercials and promotions of late for the games and exercises that supposedly train your brain and claim to turn back the clock on memory loss, in effect, working to keep you sharper. We thought we’d take a reality check view of whether this brain training really does work. Our report tonight from our Chief Medical Editor Doctor Nancy Snyderman.

DR. NANCY SNYDERMAN, reporting:
Sixty-two-year-old Wes Henson is not waiting for age to take its toll. He works out every morning, and then goes online for brain training memory games meant to sharpen brain skills.

WES HENSON: (INDISTINCT) my memory but I'm not helping alone so I'm doing everything I can to improve my memory and make it better.

DR. SNYDERMAN: For about $80 a year, the brain training program Lumosity claims it can build a better, faster brain.

(Excerpt from a Lumosity ad)

DR. SNYDERMAN: Brain training is big business, projected to be a $3 billion industry by 2015. It's even being integrated into retirement communities. Walnut Village in Southern California is an early investor in Dakim Brain Fitness. Eighty-one-year-old Dorothy Bowen uses it two to five times a week. Do you think this system makes your brain young?

DOROTHY BOWEN: I don’t know whether it makes it young, but it keeps it from deteriorating.

DR. SNYDERMAN: It does.

BOWEN: Yes.

Dr. GARY SMALL (UCLA/Dakim Chief Scientific Advisor): Older people can train their brains, can improve their everyday memory abilities and it can be fun learning how to do that.

DR. SNYDERMAN: Can brain training really work? Well, some experts in the field of human intelligence are skeptical as to whether these games can actually make you smarter. In one study,
researchers at Case Western Reserve University found that online brain training doesn't transfer to everyday tasks.

DOUGLAS DETTERMAN (Case Western Reserve University): There is no evidence that you’ll be able to remember your keys better. What you’ll be able to do is better on that test.

DR. SNYDERMAN: Both sides say it's about keeping your mind active, whether it's brain training, reading a book, or working on a hobby.

WES HENSON: Just because you get to a certain age that doesn’t mean your life is over. I've got to a lot to live.

BOWEN: I just love life. Hi guys.

DR. SNYDERMAN: Enjoying life as we age and working to hold on to our memories. There is a lot of controversy over brain training but here are some things I think that actually can't hurt. For any elderly person surround yourself with young people that will keep you sharper, get a pet, and take a walk outside every single day, no matter what the weather, until it is your last. Brian.

WILLIAMS: Wow, Doctor Nancy Snyderman with some good advice.

DR. SNYDERMAN: Three things. I bet.

WILLIAMS: I had a question for you I can't remember for the life of me what it was.