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Featured Article

Speed of processing training results in lower risk of dementia

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The Advanced Training in Vital Elderly study (ACTIVE) [4] was a randomized trial on the efficacy of three different types of cognitive training to preserve cognitive and daily function in older adults. Participants were randomized to either strategy-based memory or reasoning training, speed of processing training, or no-contact control conditions [4]. Cognitive training produced longitudinal improvements on the targeted cognitive outcomes, and trained participants self-reported less difficulty completing instrumental activ-ities of daily living (IADL) 10 years later [5-7]. As dementia by definition involves functional impairments, of interest is whether these interventions reduced dementia risk. Previous analysis of ACTIVE using a combination of self-report and performance-based definitions of dementia found no difference in rate of dementia by training arm at 5 years [8].

Importantly, ACTIVE subanalyses have shown that, as hy-pothesized [4], exposure to booster training was associated with larger improvements in cognitive performance and wider transfer to daily function, particularly for the reasoning and speed arms [5,9,10]. Participants randomized to greater doses of speed training demonstrated improved functional performance at 1, 2, and 5 years [5,9]. Exposure to booster training was associated with additional improvement in targeted cognitive performance at 10 years for participants receiving reasoning and speed training [5,14,15]. Thus, consideration of training dose is necessary.

Given the additional follow-up in ACTIVE and the indications that booster training enhances outcomes, it was of interest to reexamine the relation between training and dementia across 10 years. We hypothesized that exposure to cognitive training would lower the risk of dementia and that the benefit would be greatest for those attending more training sessions (i.e., booster training).

2. Methods

2.1. Study design and participants

ACTIVE was a multi-site, single-blind, 4-arm, randomized trial (NCT00298558, see Fig. 1). Participants were community-dwelling adults aged 65 years and older. Participants were excluded if they had significant cognitive dysfunction (Mini-mental State Examination [MMSE] < 23), any functional impairment (self-reported difficulty indexed by the Minimum Data Set [MDS] home care), poor vision, self-reported diagnoses of Alzheimer's disease, stroke, certain cancers, or communication difficulties [4]. Written informed consent was obtained. The study was approved by site Institutional Review Boards.

2.2. Procedures

The study protocol is detailed elsewhere [4]. Briefly, eligible participants completed baseline assessments of cognitive (i.e., memory, reasoning, and speed of processing) and functional abilities (i.e., self-report and performance-based measures of functional abilities) and were randomized (Fig. 1). Memory training focused on instruction and practice in strategy use for verbal episodic memory. Reasoning training focused on instruction and practice in strategy use related to problem-solving and serial patterns. Speed training focused on computerized, visual-perceptual exercises designed to increase the amount and complexity of information quickly processed. Each training arm consisted of ten 60-75 minute sessions over 5 to 6 weeks, delivered to small groups of participants. A subset of participants completing at least 80% of the training sessions was randomly selected to receive booster training (four 75-minute sessions) at 11 and 35 months after completion of the initial training. Thus,

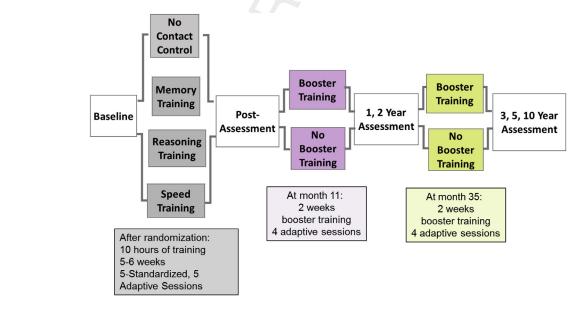


Fig. 1. The Advanced Cognitive Training in Vital Elderly study design. Participants were randomized to one of four training arms and assessed immediately after training or an equivalent delay. Assessments were completed at 1, 2, 3, 5, and 10 years. A subset of participants completed four additional booster training sessions at 11 months and again at 35 months.

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