

## &gt;&gt; EDUCATION: SPECIAL REPORT

# Get food for thought

**E** DUCATION is not about gaining qualifications — it is about exercising the mind. Psychologist Dr Peter Salmon says continued learning is like going along to the “brain gym”.

“As we get a bit older we start to get rickety in the knees, our muscles go and there are physical effects of deterioration as we age. To counter that we get stuck in to exercise, eat healthy and look after the body. Now we realise we’ve got to do the same thing with the brain,” he says.

“We now know that the brain is a dynamic organ that is constantly in a state of change, and, because of that, if it’s not kept exercised like the body it will deteriorate.

“The theory is use it or lose it.”

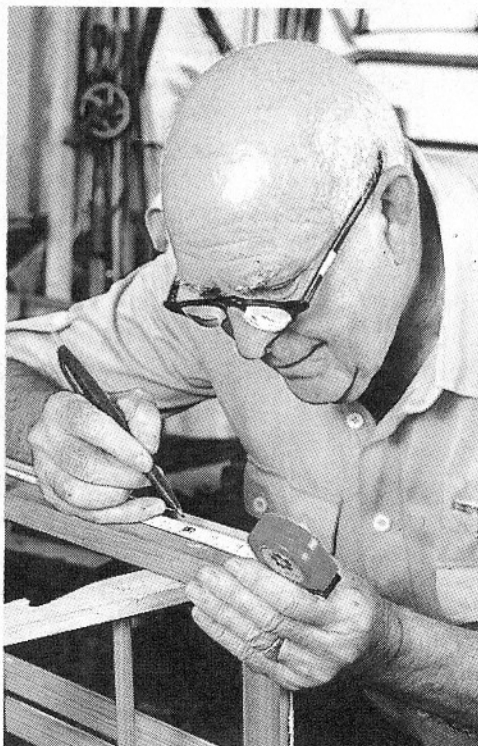
Salmon says the key part of the brain that needs to be stimulated is the area that deals with novelty and new thought.

“We know that the right hemisphere of the brain handles new stimulus. When a skill is learned, like playing tennis, there is a lot of mental activity involved initially but once that skill is learned it becomes an unconscious skill and is taken over more by the left brain and muscles of the body,” he says.

“Therefore what we now know is that if we don’t keep that learning process going then we get deterioration.”

While doing crosswords, Sudoku puzzles and other brain-teasers is good, once they become easy for the user to do they are not as beneficial.

“In the long term, learning things like a new language or a musical instrument is more important to provide stimulation because it makes



**Brain gym:** new skills help keep the mind healthy.

you work pretty hard at it all the time. It means you are forcing the brain to learn and that can be quite stimulating in its own right,” Salmon says.

A member of the Melbourne University of the

Third Age, he says physical fitness and good nutrition are also vital in maintaining a healthy brain capable of learning new things.

“The brain uses about 20 per cent of the body’s energy and about 30 per cent of its oxygen. If your heart and lungs are not functioning properly then they are not providing sufficient oxygen and energy to the brain,” he says.

## COURSES THAT MIGHT APPEAL

- Horticulture
- Food Processing - Wine
- Floristry
- Jewellery
- Tapestry
- Photography and digital photography
- Information technology
- Woodwork
- Picture framing
- Bicycles
- Furniture making
- Leadlighting and stained glass
- First aid
- Aromatic massage
- Dog behaviour and training
- Aromatherapy
- Plan, conduct and review a marriage ceremony
- Caravan park operations
- Visitor information services
- Writing and editing



**Infirm:** older generations will need help.

## In sickness and in health

**THEY** were the first to enjoy free health care, and had the time of their lives in the swinging '60s. But the post-war Baby Boomers are now paying the price.

Today's 60-year-olds are the first modern generation to be less healthy than their immediate predecessors, despite improvements in medicine and standards of living.

Researcher Teresa Seeman compared the health of thousands of men and women in their 60s, 70s and 80s with data collected 10 years earlier.

She found that one in five 60-somethings polled needed help with basic day-to-day activities — up more than 50 per cent on a decade earlier.

Prof Seeman, of the University of California, warned that the growing number of over-60s would stretch the health system, affect productivity and make younger people compete with them for health resources.

DAILY MAIL