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Protect your brain

By LEE MOON KEEN

It is by no means a certainty that we lose some of our cognitive abilities as we grow older. There are steps that can be taken to preserve brain health.

A WHILE back, Malaysia left the ranks of developing countries to join the world community as a Newly Industrialised Country (NIC). We are now in the post-industrial age. Citizens young and old now face a brave new world in which new gadgets seem to be launched every few months (at least it feels like it).

While the young can rapidly learn to use each new gizmo, the not-so-young labour to master these mysterious technologies, be they automated teller machines, cell phones, digital cameras or remote controls.

It is not possible to survive as a Luddite (defined in MSN Encarta as an opponent of new technology), even in Malaysia.

What this means is that, each of us, young and old, are required to keep our wits about us and to try and maintain our brain function for as long as possible.

The good news is that significant loss of mental ability is no longer considered to be part of normal ageing. Mental decline is therefore not inevitable.

Our cognitive function – that is, the ability to remember, learn, think, and reason – can in theory, be preserved right up to advanced old age.

Severe mental decline, termed dementia, is caused by disease processes: it is not a predestined part of ageing.

Keeping mentally agile

A healthy lifestyle with satisfying work and social engagement goes a long way towards preserving our brain health. But can we, on our part, do more to enhance this benefit?

For this to be achieved, we look to medical science for answers: a lot of research is in progress with this objective in mind.

Like all successful projects, to tap the brain's full potential, conditions have to right from the moment of conception (choose your parents!), and subsequently nurturing development in the womb and through early childhood.

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