

ACT

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Reminiscing as we age: Many of us find joy in the telling (and retelling) of past experiences, especially as we age. Since Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, wise people have realized that reminiscing is a part of aging. Some may tire of hearing these stories, but there are important reasons for allowing older people to engage in this pastime.

As we age, our memory develops into what memory specialist and psychologist Douwe Draaisma calls a "nostalgia factory," which may bring pleasure to our lives. Studies show that when centenarians are asked to reminisce on past events, especially the most enjoyable and meaningful, they recall more from their *first* 20 years of life than from more recent decades.

Engaging with older people, including those with mild-to-moderate dementia, while they recollect past events can be rewarding for them and the listener. It is not unusual to see someone "come alive" when relating a memory, especially when the listener shows genuine interest by maintaining eye contact, responding with nods or appropriate facial expressions, and talking with the reminiscer. In turn, the listener is given the opportunity to learn about a culture or era they may have only read about. They may become better acquainted with family history through these stories, or gain an understanding of how the social, political, and economic conditions of an era may have affected an ancestor's life experience, along with their behavior or decisions, for example.

People in late stages of Alzheimer's disease can have hours or even an entire day when they suddenly recall important events. Family members tell me their loved ones appeared to return to their "normal" selves during these times. Sadly, they can't be like that all the time, but we should treasure the ability of the brain to hold onto the past as well as it does. For family members and caregivers of those with Alzheimer's, reminiscing offers comfort by showing that at least some memories continue

to reside deep within our brains for most, or maybe all, of our lives.

Resistance and Resilience: Brain aging is fascinating and complicated! A new question has emerged since ACT began: how is it that some people whose brains show Alzheimer's changes (plaques of amyloid protein and tangles of tau protein), can live to a very old age and not show signs of dementia?

Two recent ACT papers shed some light. In Bowles et al, "Cognitive Resilience to Alzheimer's Disease Pathology in the Human Brain", we looked at 276 brains with moderate to high levels of Alzheimer's pathology. About 25% of these participants weren't showing signs of dementia when they died. These people generally had more college education, and less changes like scarring of the hippocampus (memory center of the brain) or microscopic strokes.

In Latimer et al, "Resistance and resilience to Alzheimer's disease pathology are associated with reduced cortical pTau and absence of limbic-predominant age-related TDP-43 encephalopathy in a community-based cohort", we focused on persons 85 and older who died without dementia or pathologic changes (resilient) and those with high levels of pathology but no clinical dementia (resistant). Both groups had lower levels of a novel protein TDP43 and a version of tau protein (pTau).

These findings do not point to a specific strategy to preserve our brains, but they do offer clues for ways to prevent or treat late-life dementias.

JUST FOR FUN:

Q: Why was the croissant living at the zoo?

A: It was "bread" in captivity.

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