

# Unveiling Insights and Strategies for Cognitive Mental Acuity

Muskan Malviya<sup>1</sup>, Neelam Balekar<sup>2,\*</sup>, Shivani Agrawal<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

*This comprehensive review focuses on the intricate facets of cognition, emphasizing its multifaceted nature rooted in thought, experience and sensory perception. The role of key brain regions, such as the prefrontal cortex, temporal lobes, parietal cortex, occipital cortex and cerebellum, is elucidated in shaping various mental functions. The pathophysiology of cognitive decline is examined, linking specific impairments to damage in distinct brain regions. The study delves into pharmacological and non-pharmacological interventions for cognition enhancement, including detailed discussions on cognitive stimulation therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, social interaction, neurobic exercises, physical exercises, acupressure, yoga, cognitive training, pranayama and music therapy. The detailed examination of pharmacological interventions encompasses the analysis of substances such as methylphenidate, modafinil and cholinesterase inhibitors; while the non-pharmacological approaches cover a broad range, extending from mindful therapies to lifestyle modifications. The study highlights the potential of these interventions in promoting mental well-being and addresses the need for individualized approaches. With a focus on diverse cognitive enhancement measures, this review provides a comprehensive overview of current research and insights into the multifaceted field of perception.*

**Keywords:** Attention, cognition, cognitive decline, interventions, memory, perception

## INTRODUCTION

Cognition, rooted in the Latin "cognoscere", involves mental processes for acquiring knowledge, reflecting the intricate interplay of thought, experience and sensory perception. It encompasses both conscious and subconscious processes integral to human intelligence, directing focused attention, acquiring new information through learning and making decisions based on cognitive assessments. Language interpretation enables meaningful communication while detecting and understanding stimuli from the environment is vital for sensory engagement. Problem-solving, memory utilization and reasoning reflect adaptive intelligence. The hippocampus, a crucial brain region, hosts neural circuits pivotal for mental functions such as learning and memory, shaping mental function's perceptual and intellectual dimensions. Assessing cognitive well-being involves various facets like orientation, problem-solving, abstract thinking and language use. The hippocampus's role extends beyond memory, influencing diverse cognitive activities essential for comprehensive mental functioning, making it a focal point for understanding cognitive health. The amygdala, named for its almond shape has historically tied to fear and rewards. It processes sensory input through the basolateral complex, impacting emotional and mental functions. The central nucleus influences autonomic responses,

### \*Author for Correspondence

Neelam Balekar

E-mail: [neelambalekar@ipsacademy.org](mailto:neelambalekar@ipsacademy.org)

<sup>1</sup>Student, Department of Pharmacology, IPS Academy College of Pharmacy, Indore (M.P), India

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of Pharmacology, IPS Academy College of Pharmacy, Indore (M.P), India

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Pharmacology, IPS Academy College of Pharmacy, Indore (M.P), India

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while other nuclei likely shape decision-making and memory. Its crucial role spans a spectrum of human emotions, studied through physiological and behavioral measures in animal models [1–4].

### Types of Cognition

*Attention:* Attention is a cognitive function that enables individuals to concentrate on a particular stimulus within their surroundings [2].

*Language:* Language development involves cognitive skills for understanding and expressing ideas verbally and in writing, which are crucial for effective communication and thought [2].

*Learning:* Learning involves absorbing new information, synthesizing knowledge, and integrating it with existing understanding, constituting essential cognitive activities for knowledge acquisition [2].

*Memory:* Memory is a crucial cognitive function, enabling the retention and recall of information and forming a cornerstone in the learning process [2].

*Perception:* Perception, a cognitive skill, enables individuals to receive sensory input, process it and respond to their environment, facilitating interaction and adaptation [2].

*Thought:* Thought is a foundational element in all cognitive processes, allowing individuals to engage in tasks such as decision-making, problem-solving and complex reasoning [2].

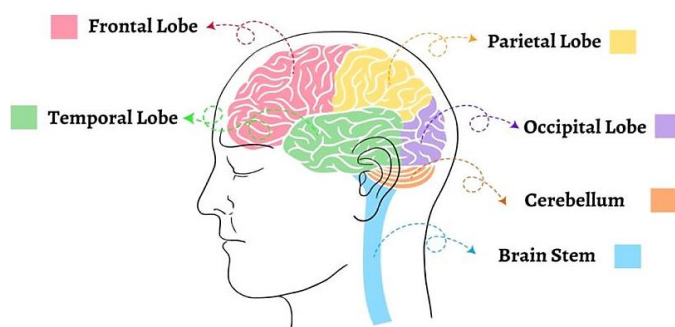
### BRAIN REGIONS INVOLVED IN COGNITION

*Frontal Cortex:* The prefrontal cortex (PFC), located in the frontal cortex, is essential for higher cognitive functions like attention, memory retention, decision-making and cognitive control. It is vital in coordinating purposeful actions and integrating information from diverse brain regions [5].

*Temporal Lobes:* The temporal lobes, encompassing the hippocampus and other regions, are involved in various cognitive tasks, including forming memory, recognition, language processing and auditory perception. Notably, the hippocampus is crucial for the establishment of declarative memory [6].

*Parietal Cortex:* The parietal cortex contributes to cognitive functions like sensorimotor integration, spatial perception and attention. It assists in merging sensory information and guiding actions in the environment [7].

*Occipital Cortex:* The main function of the occipital lobe is visual processing, containing both the primary and association visual cortex. It is vital for tasks such as visual imaging, color perception and recognizing objects. The boundaries are delineated by the parieto-occipital sulcus and an imaginary line on both the inner and outer surfaces, without altering the intended meaning of the sentence [8].



**Figure 1.** Brain region involved in cognition Pathophysiology [1].

*Cerebellum:* There is growing recognition that the cerebellum is involved not only in motor coordination but also in cognitive processing and the regulation of emotions. The main sensorimotor

region is located in the anterior lobe, while the posterior lobe's medial aspect contains a secondary sensorimotor region [9]. These all-brain regions involved in cognition are shown in Figure 1.

A decline in cognitive function or deficits typically arises from damage to neuronal tissue, affecting both the grey and white matter in the brain. Grey matter, which includes the cortex, thalamus and basal ganglia, is pivotal for cognitive functions. Meanwhile, white matter, comprising the sheaths of axons that connect various grey matter regions, is crucial for facilitating effective communication between different areas of the brain. Distinct impairments in cognitive functions are connected to harm in specific regions of the brain. For instance, damage to the parietal lobe can cause difficulties in tasks such as dressing and pose challenges to visuospatial function. Impairment to the systems in the frontal lobe may lead to deficits concerning planning and abstract comprehension. Likewise, injury to the temporal lobes is associated with shortcomings in language and memory functions [10].

Understanding the precise areas affected provides valuable insights into the manifestation of cognitive deficits. It highlights the intricate interplay between different regions of the brain and underscores the specificity of cognitive functions associated with each area. This knowledge is pivotal in diagnosing and comprehensively addressing cognitive decline, enabling tailored interventions based on the affected brain regions and contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the pathology of cognitive impairments [10].

## **COGNITION ENHANCEMENT MEASURES**

### **Pharmacological Interventions**

Recent research focuses on pharmacological interventions to enhance cognitive functions. Lynch suggests a "dimensional" system for defining and classifying Cognitive Enhancer Drugs (CEDs). This nuanced framework considers various dimensions to accurately categorize CED candidates, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach reflecting complex interactions and effects on cognitive function [11].

### **Methylphenidate**

Methylphenidate enhances attention by stimulating cortical dopaminergic and noradrenergic systems, validated through PET studies. Oral administration at 0.25 mg/kg inhibits the dopamine transporter by 50%, elevating extracellular dopamine. Even at therapeutic doses (0.14 mg/kg), it strongly binds to both dopamine and norepinephrine transporters. While effective in sustained vigilance tasks, its efficacy diminishes in complex situations requiring selective attention [12, 13].

### **Modafinil**

Modafinil, initially developed for narcolepsy-related sleepiness, enhances wakefulness by binding to forebrain dopamine transporters, elevating extracellular dopamine. Research conducted by Madras *et al.* revealed its binding to thalamic norepinephrine transporters. Modafinil also modulates hypothalamic orexinergic neurons, showcasing its dual action in influencing neurochemical processes associated with vigilance and attention [11].

### **Cholinesterase Inhibitors**

In research conducted by Raschetti *et al.*, it was observed that Classical Cholinesterase Inhibitors (CEDs) like rivastigmine and donepezil enhance cholinergic activity in the brain by inhibiting acetylcholinesterase (AChEIs). Widely used in Alzheimer's treatment, they prove ineffective for Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) patients. Limited data exist on AChEIs' cognitive effects on healthy adults [14].

### **Rivastigmine**

Rivastigmine adversely affects episodic memory but enhances motor learning and visuospatial functions in healthy elderly individuals, as evidenced by studies. This dual impact suggests a complex

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relationship between the drug and cognitive functions, underscoring the need for further research and understanding of its diverse neurological effects [15].

### **Donepezil**

In research conducted by Yesavage *et al.*, it was observed that Donepezil demonstrates diverse effects, enhancing cognitive function in healthy young individuals. Paradoxically, it is linked to attention and short-term memory deficits in the same demographic. This dual nature underscores the complexity of Donepezil's impact, emphasizing the need for further research and individualized medical approaches for optimal outcomes [16].

### **Non-Pharmacological Interventions Cognitive Stimulation Therapy**

Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST) seeks to enhance different facets of behavioral and psychological symptoms, including mild to moderate cognitive decline resulting in compromised social interaction, communication abilities and reduced quality of life among elderly individuals with dementia. Stemming from Reality Orientation Therapy within geriatric healthcare, Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST) aims to enhance cognitive function in seniors facing confusion and disorientation due to dementia. Built on the principle that insufficient cognitive activity accelerates cognitive decline, Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST) administers intensive training via a range of intellectually stimulating activities. These engagements encompass a variety of cognitive activities such as puzzles, word games, collaborative endeavors, memory exercises, tasks involving shape and color identification, pattern recognition activities, mazes, intricate video games, communal discussions and indoor pastimes like knitting, gardening and baking. The goal of these activities is to maintain cognitive involvement, enhance concentration, and stimulate active thinking and memory, ultimately contributing to an overall improvement in cognitive function [17].

### **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy**

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is a form of psychotherapy designed to assist individuals in modifying detrimental thought patterns and behaviors contributing to mental health issues. The primary objective of CBT is to substitute these negative patterns with more constructive ways of thinking and behaving, consequently leading to enhancements in mood and overall mental well-being. Beck characterized CBT as a structured and goal-oriented therapeutic approach that underscores collaboration between the therapist and the client. The process entails the identification and confrontation of negative thoughts, beliefs and attitudes, with an emphasis on replacing them with positive and accurate alternatives. Behavioral interventions, such as exposure therapy, are frequently integrated with CBT to aid individuals in overcoming anxieties and fears [18]. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) directs its attention toward modifying the involuntary negative thoughts that may play a role in exacerbating emotional challenges, such as depression and anxiety. These automatic pessimistic thoughts also exert an adverse impact on our emotional state [18].

### **Social Interaction**

Social interaction is a fundamental aspect of human existence and stands as a potent lifestyle adjustment capable of yielding substantial enhancements in cognitive abilities. Recent studies highlight the significant influence of a brief 10-min period of social interaction, especially when it involves intellectually stimulating conversations. This study demonstrates that such interactions can foster brain plasticity, leading to notable improvements in crucial cognitive functions such as learning, memory, attention and cognitive control. In essence, the findings highlight the profound influence of social engagement on the malleability of the brain, showcasing its potential to positively shape cognitive processes. The results emphasize the significance of incorporating social interaction, especially those featuring intellectually stimulating discussions, as a valuable strategy for promoting cognitive well-being. This underlines the idea that meaningful social engagement not only enriches our social lives but also serves as a catalyst for cognitive enhancement, offering a holistic approach to nurturing mental acuity [19].

## Neurobic Exercise

Neurobics refers to a form of mental exercise or training aimed at enhancing the cognitive abilities of the brain by activating its neural networks. The term "neurobics" blends "neuro" (associated with the neurological system and brain) with "aerobics" (linked to physical activity). The underlying concept of neurobics involves deliberately challenging and stimulating the brain in novel and engaging ways. This approach is designed not only to promote brain plasticity but also to facilitate the development of fresh neural connections. The fundamental idea is to engage in activities that go beyond routine mental tasks, encouraging the brain to adapt, learn and establish new cognitive pathways [20].

Neurobic exercises engage the five senses to enhance nerve impulses and connections in the brain. They promote increased neural activity, boost blood flow and activate neuronal systems, benefiting memory formation. Specifically targeting the medial temporal lobe and cortex, these exercises facilitate the temporary storage of information before transitioning it to permanent storage [21].

The focus of neurobics is on engaging in brain exercises by performing everyday tasks in innovative ways, ultimately aiming to boost memory and cognitive abilities. This includes activities like using the non-dominant hand for tasks such as eating, writing and brushing teeth. In contrast to other brain exercises like logic puzzles and memory exercises, neurobics distinguishes itself by emphasizing the introduction of non-routine experiences and the engagement of multiple physical senses to promote neural growth and mental well-being [22]. Here are some examples.

- Executing routine tasks such as eating or brushing teeth using the non-dominant hand shown in Figure 2.
- Blindfolded taste tests to differentiate between different foods by flavor and texture [23].
- Write two random sentences assigned by investigators using the non-dominant hand.
- Read a word and generate five others that start with the same letter.
- Awaken and identify the scent of vanilla.
- Select clothing, shoes, etc., without looking, ensuring they have matching or contrasting textures [24].



**Figure 2.** Neurobics exercise [25].

## Physical Exercises

Numerous studies investigate the significant influence of physical activity on fostering brain health, promoting neuroplasticity and mitigating age-related cognitive decline and neurodegenerative disorders. Both voluntary exercises, exemplified by wheel running and forced exercise, such as regular treadmill running, have been subjects of investigation regarding their impact on the rate of hippocampal neurogenesis. These activities have demonstrated the potential to enhance learning and memory

performance. Beyond their cognitive benefits, physical activities exhibit a neuroprotective effect, extending their positive outcomes to various aspects of health in older adults. In the case of healthy elderly individuals, engaging in physical activity has been associated with improvements in cognition and motor abilities. Moreover, for elderly individuals facing dementia and related cognitive impairments, physical activity has shown a neuroprotective influence, positively affecting not only cognitive functions but also aspects like balance, strength and mobility [26].

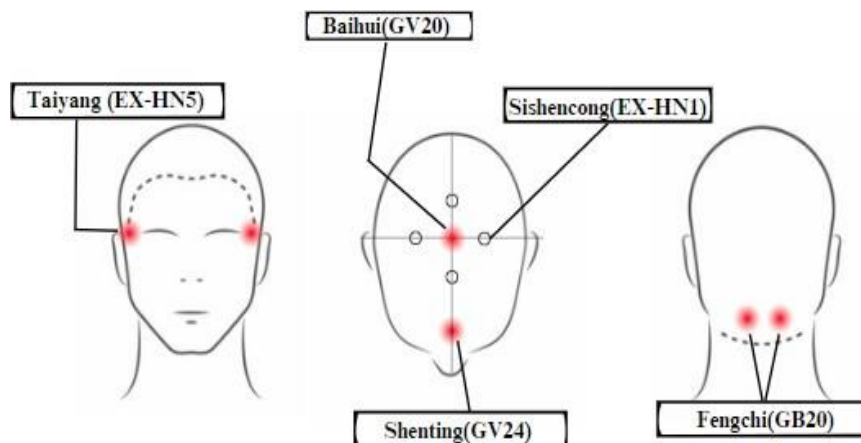
The findings underscore the multifaceted advantages of incorporating physical activity into daily routines, highlighting its potential as a preventive measure against cognitive decline and a supportive intervention for individuals already grappling with cognitive impairments. As a holistic approach, physical activity emerges as a valuable strategy for promoting overall brain health and preserving cognitive function in aging populations [26].

### **Acupressure**

Acupressure, a non-intrusive method, utilizes fingers, thumbs, knuckles, or a suitable tool to exert pressure on acupoints. I discovered that acupressure correlated with improved working memory performance in individuals experiencing cognitive impairment. The selection of acupressure points in this study aligns with effective acupuncture points for Cognitive Impairment (CI) treatment. Acupuncture addresses energy imbalances by inserting needles into specific body parts. Acupressure follows the same principles, activating these points using hands and fingers. No standardized acupuncture point exists for CI treatment, often utilizing point combinations for enhanced efficacy in CI. Baihui (GV20), Fengchi (GB20), Shenting (GV24), Sishencong (EX-HN1) and Taiyang (EX-HN5) are key acupoints frequently used for CI treatment, each contributing unique benefits, as demonstrated in systematic reviews [27].

Baihui (GV20) is positioned precisely at the midpoint of the crown, along an imaginary line connecting the apexes of the two ears. Fengchi (GB20) is situated in the posterior lateral region of the neck, within the depression formed by the upper edges of the trapezius and sternocleidomastoid muscles. Shenting (GV24) is found on the head, precisely 0.5 cun (a unit equivalent to the width of the participant's thumb in Traditional Chinese Medicine) above the midpoint of the frontal hairline. Sishencong (EX-HN1) consists of four points located on the crown of the head, each positioned 1 cm away from Baihui (GV20) in the anterior, bilateral and posterior directions. Taiyang (EX-HN5) is situated at the intersection of the extensions of the eyebrow and lower eyelid, along the outer border of the eye socket [27]. These acupoints are shown in the Figure 3.

The technique involved applying firm and deep pressure on each acupoint using the middle finger pulp, with the intensity adjusted based on individual tolerance. The pressure was sustained for 10 sec, followed by a clockwise motion for 30 sec and then an anticlockwise motion for the subsequent 30 sec. Afterward, the pressure was released and a 15 sec massage was administered to induce relaxation. This sequence was reiterated for each acupoint, ensuring a consistent approach for all participants [27].



**Figure 3.** Acupressure points [27].

### Yoga

Yoga, an ancient Indian discipline, encompasses the practice of specific postures, regulated breathing and meditation. Its purpose is to instill balance and well-being in the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual facets of an individual's life. Symbolically portrayed as a tree, yoga comprises eight essential components: *Yama* (universal ethics), *Niyama* (individual ethics), *Asana* (physical postures), *Pranayama* (breath control), *Pratyahara* (sensory control), *Dharana* (concentration), *Dyana* (meditation) and *Samadhi* (bliss). This holistic approach underscores the interconnectedness of various dimensions, promoting a harmonious and healthy lifestyle [28].

Yoga has the potential to boost cognitive function by heightening body awareness and attention, exerting a positive influence on overall cognition. Studies propose that the mood-enhancing and anti-depressive effects of yoga may contribute to improved cognitive performance. Particularly in adolescents, yoga positively impacts memory, enhancing concentration and short-term memory. Despite its recognized well-being benefits, the regular practice of yoga and its influence on cognitive functions lack thorough exploration. Regular yoga sessions yield physical advantages, affecting various physiological parameters and influencing the central nervous system. Studies indicate increased grey matter volume in the temporal and frontal lobes, promoting better mental health and cognitive functions. The positive outcomes extend to attention, focus, visual processing, motor activity, eye-hand coordination and cognitive speed and accuracy [29]. Some yoga asanas are shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** Yoga asanas for cognition [29].

### Cognitive Training

Brain and cognition stimulation techniques find widespread application in sports and rehabilitation, with studies and discussions focusing on cognitive enhancement in aging, dementia and neuropsychiatric disorders. Visualization techniques involve vividly imagining task performance, activating neural networks simultaneously, and optimizing neural reorganization.

Targeted training for working memory (WM) shows increasing evidence, enhancing cognitive skills by improving WM capacity through effective encoding, registering and retrieval methods. 'Strategy training' benefits children with Down syndrome and slows WM decline in older adults. 'Core training methods' involve high-intensity WM tasks, demonstrating cognitive and intelligence improvements in various populations. Memory therapy in Alzheimer's and cognitive training for mild cognitive impairment prove successful and individualized based on daily challenges and residual cognitive capacities. Cognitive stimulation techniques utilize ecological or virtual environments to counter age-related cognitive decline, offering diverse training options for memory, learning, attention, executive functions, mnemonic techniques and global cognition [11].

### **Pranayama**

Pranayama, an integral aspect of yoga, combines "Prana" (breath) and "Ayama" (stretching or expansion). It involves three phases: inhalation (*puraka*), retention (*kumbhaka*) and exhalation (*rechaka*), with varying speeds. Different breathing patterns within Pranayama have specific effects on afferent pathways and voluntary control or focused breath attention enhances connectivity among various brain areas. The voluntary breathing network encompasses the caudal-medial frontal cortex, premotor area, orbitofrontal and motor cortex, insula, superior temporal gyrus and amygdala. Attention to breathing engages the anterior cingulate cortex, premotor area, insula and hippocampus, shedding light on potential brain mechanisms in therapeutic breathing exercises. While numerous studies explore Pranayama's effects, limited evidence exists on its immediate impact. This study aims to raise awareness among students regarding the cognitive benefits of Pranayama [30]. Here are a few examples:

*Bhramari*: Cover your ears with your thumbs, position the index fingers on the temples above the eyebrows and place the other three fingers on the sides of your nose. Inhale slowly through your nose, holding your breath for a few seconds. While keeping your mouth closed, exhale gradually, producing a humming sound. Repeat this process five times [31].

*Anulom-Vilom*: Close the index and middle fingers of your right hand. Proceed to close the right nostril with your thumb and exhale slowly through the left nostril. Following the exhalation, inhale gradually through the same left nostril and hold your breath for 2 sec. Then, close the left nostril using your ring finger and exhale through the right nostril. Inhale through the right nostril, hold for 2 sec and exhale from the left nostril, closing the right nostril with your right thumb. Repeat this sequence for 2–5 min [31].

*Kapalbhati*: This constitutes a practice involving passive inhalation and deliberate exhalation. The individual is instructed to breathe regularly and exhale forcefully, engaging the abdominal muscles vigorously by pulling them forcefully towards the back. This process should be sustained for 2–5 min [31].

### **Music Therapy**

Music has gained attention as an alternative means of enhancing cognition. Music therapy, along with activities such as listening, singing and playing instruments, shows promise in neuropsychiatric disorders. Two main types of music therapy are recognized: receptive and active. Receptive therapy involves therapists playing or selecting music for recipients, while active therapy engages recipients in music-making, instrument playing and participation in dance or singing. Positive effects on working memory, perceptual speed and motor skills were observed in the elderly after piano lessons. Music, proposed as a potent neuroprotective exercise alongside activities like puzzles, demonstrated effectiveness in group therapy for depression and cognitive functions in the elderly with mild to moderate dementia. In psychosocial rehabilitation for enduring mental illnesses, music therapy enhances psychological well-being, social cohesiveness and emotional expressions, reduces social

isolation and improves participation in external events. Notably, music therapy significantly mitigated aggression/hostility in pre-adolescents with emotional, learning, and behavioral challenges [26].

## CONCLUSION

The intricate nature of cognition underscores its profound impact on human intelligence. From exploring brain regions to embracing personalized interventions, the diverse strategies highlighted, from cognitive stimulation therapy to music therapy, collectively contribute to a holistic approach to enhancing cognitive well-being throughout life's stages.

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