

TO YOUR HEALTH

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Hands on Thinking

By Maeve Lobo LICSW

June, as officially designated, is Alzheimer's & Brain Awareness Month—a timely reminder that the preservation of brain health is not only a medical imperative but a deeply human one. Amid the myriad of strategies we adopt to keep our minds agile and alive, there is one often-overlooked instrument with surprising influence: the hand.



The hand, is a marvel of anatomical engineering and refinement. It threads needles and plays Chopin; it lifts, it digs, it gestures. It can wield a hammer or cradle a new-borns' head. We hold hands in solidarity, in affection, in

silence. In that simple gesture—palms clasped, fingers entwined—we participate in something cognitively potent: a union that activates emotional and sensory centers of the brain.

Facts About the Five-Fingered Marvel

Structurally, the human hand is comprised of 27 bones—about a quarter of the total number in the body—along with a complex network of muscles, tendons, and nerves. It is simultaneously delicate and resilient. The palm is covered in a fibrous structure known as the palmar aponeurosis, protecting the vulnerable surface. Control is largely dictated by the forearm, which choreographs the hands' capacity for power, precision, and perception. Three major nerves—the median, ulnar, and radial—conduct signals to and from the brain, while arteries ferry oxygen to keep the entire system robust and running.

Over the course of a lifetime, the average person bends their fingers an estimated 25 million times. Each fingertip houses some 17,000 tactile receptors, making them among the most sensitive parts of the human body. These are not merely tools, but entries of experience.

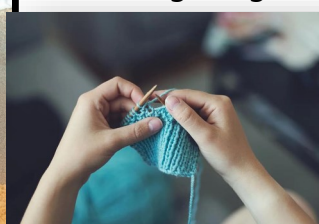
The Handmade Life

In our digital age, the tactile act of writing has taken a secondary role. And yet, research—from Scientific American to the Norwegian University of Science and Technology—tells us that the act of writing by hand enhances memory retention and activates a broader range of brain activity. For young children in particular, handwriting builds fine motor skills and deepens learning. For adults, it is a form of contemplative discipline. A few minutes a day, a page of scribbled thoughts—this is not trivial. They are acts of neurological stewardship.

Writing can be a gateway to more wide ranging practices: memoir, journaling, letter-writing. Consider dispatching a piece to The Villager, or scribbling a note to an old friend. Your brain—and theirs—will thank you.



However, words are not the only yarns we weave. The humble acts of knitting and crocheting, long considered domestic or



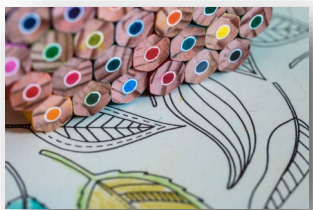
decorative, have become cognitive goldmines. A 2023 report from the Craft Yarn Council noted that nearly 40 percent of respondents took up

yarn work specifically to improve their mental health. Many worked in service of others, crafting gifts for charity and friends. To knit, to crochet, to create: each stitch is a gesture of kindness.

The Knit Wits, CWV needle-wielders, offer not only companionship but an invitation to engagement—emotional, sensory, and intellectual. There is something profound

continued

about producing a tangible object with your own hands: a scarf, a blanket, an expression filled with warmth and wearable.



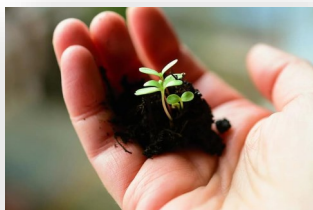
Gardening and coloring, too, return us to a tactile environment. The Chaplain's coloring sessions are quiet exercises in

mindfulness, endorsed by findings from the Mayo Clinic, which confirm that to color is to calm the mind. Free of competition, rich with possibility, the pages can be filled with play and presence.

Meanwhile, the Garden Club seeks volunteers for the tomato patch—sun, soil, and quiet joy included. In parts of



Norway and the UK, physicians are now prescribing time in nature, a "green prescription" that encourages cognitive health through active engagement with nature. Since 2015, Norway has embedded this principle into national social policy, a gentle but firm acknowledgment that health does not reside solely in pills but in peat too.



This month of memory and awareness, let us consider the hand: capable, expressive, quietly miraculous. In its gestures—of writing, knitting, gardening, its caress—we find not only action but connection to enrich our lives.

· In brief: How do hands work? January 23, 2025; <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK279362/>

· Why Writing by Hand Is Better for Memory and Learning – Scientific American. February 21, 2024

· <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20250509-how-gardening-boosts-brain-health>

Spotlight on Social Work

Maeve Lobo, LICSW



During a conversation with the Music Therapist, Gwen Healy, she shared that the following songs are most frequently requested at the Nursing Center. In addition to being uplifting, these songs encourage Residents to engage in conversation and movement - both which are vital in maintaining brain function and cognitive health.

- "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning" - from Oklahoma!
- "On the Sunny Side of the Street" - Frank Sinatra
- "Fly me to the Moon" - Frank Sinatra
- "Tennessee Waltz" - Patti Page
- "Ring of Fire" - Johnny Cash
- "It's a Lovely Day Today" - Ella Fitzgerald

In the near future the Clinic SW is hoping to collaborate with the Music Therapist and facilitate a therapeutic group in the Nursing Center.

Clinic Closure

The clinic will be closed on **Thursday, June 19th** in honor of the Juneteenth holiday.

