

Woodworking and Your Health

by

Phil Rasmussen

According to research in the UK, there are six things that you can do to reduce your risk of getting Alzheimer's and other dementias. They are:

1. Physical activity.
2. Eating healthily.
3. Don't smoke.
4. Drink less alcohol.
5. Take control of your health.
6. Stay mentally and socially active.

Another UK study includes the above but breaks #5, (take control of your health) into two categories

- 5a Maintaining a healthy weight.
- 5b Keeping your blood pressure at a healthy level.

Let's look at how woodworking helps to reduce your risk of dementia and the relationship of your health to woodworking.

Physical activity

There are four types of exercise: endurance, strength, balance, and flexibility.

Woodworking is a physical activity that incorporates all four types of exercise.

- **Endurance**: Being able to complete the following tasks without stopping to rest:
 - pushing wood through a table saw
 - pushing wood through a jointer
 - completing sawing wood using hand saws
 - hand planing and/or hand sanding wood
- **Strength**: Building strength is typically done by weight lifting. Whether it is long boards or plywood sheets, woodworkers are constantly lifting and moving wood
- **Balance**: Balance is achieved in two ways. First while carrying wood around the shop, balance must be maintained in order to control the wood, especially long or large pieces of wood. Second, maintaining proper posture and balance is extremely important to safety when using power equipment such as table saws, circular saws, planers, joiners, lathes, and band saws.
- **Flexibility**: When talking about flexibility, most people would probably think in terms of being able to twist and turn to insert screws in hard-to-reach places on a

project. However, flexibility, when combined with balance, is important when properly using table saws, joiners and lathes.

Although most of the exercise done in woodworking shops is anaerobic, it is important to work on aerobic exercise as well. Aerobic benefits can be found in hand work such as sawing, planing, sanding, and using an axe to chop wood up.

Eating healthily

We all know the importance of a healthy diet. There is a direct link between eating healthily and the quality of physical exercise you get. For example eating too much sugar just prior to woodworking will sap your endurance and strength.

Many foods can trigger vertigo and a loss of balance. Some of these are: aged cheeses, processed meats, chocolate, coffee, MSG, and alcoholic beverages.

Don't smoke

Smoking is directly associated with many diseases and illnesses, dementia being one of them. It should be a no-brainer that smoking, even cannabis, negatively affects your health.

However smoking can have a greater and more direct effect on you if you smoke in the workshop. Wood is a very combustible material. The drier it is, the greater its combustibility. Sawdust has an even higher combustibility rating than solid wood. Your workshop probably also contains a lot of other flammable materials such as paints, stains, solvents, and adhesives.

Drink less alcohol.

Everyone knows the dangers of drinking and driving. What a lot of people don't realize is that these same dangers exist when operating any piece of machinery or equipment. When driving, you are operating a machine (automobile). The same is true in your woodshop. Alcohol and woodworking do not go together.

Not only is judgment impaired but also your balance, strength, and endurance.

Take control of your health.

All of the above is part of taking control of your health. While maintaining a healthy weight and keeping blood pressure at a good level, there are other things you can do for good health.

As we age, our health deteriorates. In addition to keeping an eye on blood pressure, you need to also keep an eye on your blood sugar and other health issues. Low or high blood pressure and/or blood sugar can cause blackouts and comas. Not good when

using a tablesaw or other power equipment. Similarly extreme headaches, muscle cramps, eye issues can cause momentary distractions that can also result in severe injuries.

Like petting a favorite pet, working on something you really enjoy can lower stress levels which in turn provides other health benefits.

Stay mentally and socially active.

Being actively involved in a woodworking organization impacts your health through socialization with the organization's members.

While working on a woodworking project can lower stress it can also challenge you mentally. These challenges keep your mind active, and help to reduce the risks of dementia. Many studies have shown that people who work on problem-solving issues are less prone to dementia. To help you stave off dementia, here is a challenging puzzle for you to resolve.

1. You have a rectangular piece of wood 8 inches x 3 inches.
2. On another board there is a hole 12 inches x 2 inches.
3. The challenge is to take the 8 x 3 inch board, cut it into only two pieces, so that they will fit exactly in the hole on the other board

Since the area of both wood and hole are same (24 square inches). it's possible to cut the wood and fit it into the hole....

Bonus Puzzle

1. You have a perfect square piece of wood.
2. Your challenge is to cut the square into 5 smaller squares of the same area
3. You can use any number of straight cuts as long as each cut begins and ends with a red dot.
4. You can re-arrange the cut pieces to make the squares

Don't cheat! Exercise your mind by trying to solving these puzzles before looking at the solutions. After all you want to reduce the risk of any dementia.



The solution to these puzzles can be found at: <https://youtu.be/k1XLUZ6LtSQ>