

# Encyclopedia of Play in Today's Society

## Play for the Elderly

Contributors: Helena Kling  
Editors: Rodney P. Carlisle  
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*Homo longaevus ludens*. The world population of the elderly is increasing and the elderly are living longer, healthier lives. Vast amounts of money are being spent on research on the elderly because remaining autonomous, maintaining social ties, and experiencing pleasure become more difficult to realize where there is age related decline in functioning. Many researchers studying [p. 541 ↓ ] aging claim that if minds and bodies are kept active, then the onset of deterioration of memory and cognitive decline would be delayed.

They recommend playing games to keep the aging mind and body active. Others in the field counsel restraint in such claims. Although physical activities are clearly important in promoting overall health, their protective effect remains uncertain. The leisure time that comes with aging is a new aspect of living, which many have to learn to cope with. It is not accepted as fact in all communities that when retired, one plays games and has hobbies, nor is it known how many people actively look forward to their retirement to be able to play, golf, Bridge, or Bingo, for example, or how many intend to take up gaming.

Time spent at play can improve the quality of life of the elderly as they acquire skills from games that are new to them, whether the games are traditional or use new technology. They enjoy social contact, think, make decisions, exercise memory and coordination skills, and have fun. Fear and sadness leading to lowering of self esteem and depression are kept at bay. Once mental deterioration because of illness begins, new games cannot be taught, nor can a person who has never played games become a player of games. Accepting that play is permitted and learning new games and methods of strategic thought should begin when still "y<sup>o</sup>un<sup>g</sup> old." Caretakers of frail elderly people should learn how to adapt a familiar game to an individual, so as to give contentment in achievement.

Many games may be played in ways to suit all ages and abilities. The urge to play is strong, and ingenuity over-comes difficulties engendered by failing sight and arthritic limbs. Equipment is available that allows game pieces or cards to be held, arranged, and laid down in the accepted playable manner. Players in wheelchairs may move pieces with sticks on a carpet marked as a board. Domino tiles are manufactured in many sizes, with non-skid surfaces, raised dots, or dots in Braille or in colors. There are constructions, usually of wood, to hold the played pieces in position. Checkers boards

and pieces may be obtained in many sizes. Pieces are distinguished by having one color being marked and textured, and the other being smooth.



*Studies have found that playing Bingo helps you think faster and helps keep you more alert as you age.*

By adding tactile Scrabble overlays to the board and tiles, blind and visually-impaired people can play the game. There are special chess boards with a hole in each square into which the chessmen are pegged. In other games, Tic-Tac-Toe, Chinese Checkers, and puzzles, for example the same method is used. Poker chips are made of different shapes, and there are dice that are tactile and large. For sports, there are balls that beep and ring as sound beacons for goals. As technology advances, so do the ways inventors can give the elderly a means to play. Methods are being found to utilize the smallest amount of bodily movement to activate computer games. Advances in lighting and magnification have helped many to play games.

Gambling has always been an attraction for the elderly. But now with a growing population of elderly people looking for places to socialize and participate in something lively and new, casino gambling has become a favorite pastime for older Americans. The elderly have become an important source of income for casinos—families may be faced with the problem of elder addiction. Online gambling is becoming endemic worldwide, and as the elderly stake their pensions, legislation is being considered in some countries to cope with the trend.

Manufacturers catering to products for the dwindling child population in this century were quick to switch to toys and games for the growing senior population. Alarms, to monitor what is happening to the infirm, and dolls that “talk” to comfort the lonely are

marketed for the elderly. Software games, claiming to improve mental agility, have been marketed worldwide, to slow the onset of dementia and even possibly stave off Alzheimer's disease.

Their content relies on memory training tasks, which once mastered by repetition, give confidence and a feeling of well-being. New larger consoles should lead to the playing of games with physical movement in a [p. 542 ↓ ] social context, an ideal toy for seniors. A survey in 2007 claimed that 47 percent of casual video games players were older than 50, and older users not only play video games more often than their younger counterparts, but also spend more time playing per session.

Helena Kling (Educational Centre for Games in Israel)

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See Also

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