NEWS LESSON

What Happens to Your Brain When Work Stops?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What would you do with a weekday that had no timetable?
2. Which activities keep you interested without feeling like work?
3. Would you enjoy retiring with lots of plans or no plans?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**colleagues**	☐	A	people you work with
2	**researchers**	☐	B	working to help other people without being paid
3	**evidence**	☐	C	making you very, very tired
4	**decline**	☐	D	people who study something to find new facts
5	**volunteering**	☐	E	difficult things that test you
6	**exhausting**	☐	F	a slow fall to a lower level
7	**challenges**	☐	G	facts that show something is true
8	**disappear**	☐	H	stop being there

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

A German study followed women into retirement. Some thinking skills slipped, while sleep and mood improved.

1 Imagine your final day at work. You close your computer, say goodbye to your colleagues and look forward to a life without early alarms. Perhaps you plan to travel, read books or spend more time in the garden. Retirement sounds wonderful to many people. But a study from Germany, published in 2026, asked an interesting question: could leaving work change the way our brains perform?

2 The researchers studied the effects of a change in German retirement rules for women. The change made some women wait longer before they could retire early. This allowed the researchers to compare people who left work at different times. They focused on women in their sixties and looked at several tests of thinking and memory.

3 One result stood out. Among these women, spending longer in retirement was linked to lower scores on some tasks involving flexible thinking, such as processing new information. However, other kinds of knowledge did not show the same decline. The researchers did not find evidence that extra years in retirement increased diagnoses of cognitive disorders. In fact, some health measures, including sleep problems and depression, improved.

4 This is not the same as saying that retirement causes dementia. The study looked at a particular group of German women and the effects of a specific change in the law. Its findings may not apply to everybody. Also, working life can be stressful or physically difficult. Staying in an exhausting job simply to keep your brain busy may not be a good idea.

5 Scientists think mental activity could help explain the results. At work, people often have to solve problems, remember information and deal with unexpected situations. When work stops, some of these daily challenges disappear. But retired people can find other ways to stay sharp. Learning a language, joining a club, volunteering or picking up a new hobby can give the brain plenty to do.

6 The real question may not be when we stop working, but how we spend the years afterwards. Retirement can offer freedom, better rest and time with loved ones. It can also become lonely or repetitive if someone has no plans. A healthy retirement may combine relaxation with new experiences and meaningful activities. After all, leaving a job does not mean leaving curiosity, friendship or learning behind.

Sources: Journal of Health Economics. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The researchers studied one particular group of women in Germany. T F NG
2. Some health measures, such as sleep problems, improved in retirement. T F NG
3. Most German women now retire before the age of sixty. T F NG
4. The researchers found that retirement causes dementia. T F NG
5. All kinds of knowledge showed the same decline in retirement. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

careless	curiosity	kindness	meaningful	repetitive	stressful	unexpected

1. The job was _____ : she did the same small task in the same order every day.
2. The news was _____ , so nobody had prepared for it.
3. Too many deadlines can make a job very _____ and leave people feeling worried.
4. Many retired people want to do something _____ , like helping others, so their days feel important.
5. Children learn fast because their _____ makes them ask questions all the time.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. A study from Germany, _____ in 2026, asked an interesting question. (PUBLISH)
2. The change _____ some women wait longer before retiring early. (MAKE)
3. Retirement _____ wonderful to many people. (SOUND)
4. Spending longer in retirement _____ to lower scores on some tasks. (LINK)
5. This _____ the researchers to compare people who left work at different times. (ALLOW)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Some adjectives and nouns need one fixed preposition. Learn the pair as one chunk, for example worried about.

about at by in of on to

1. Retirement can be a big change for people who are used _____ a busy job.
2. Many people are proud _____ the work they did.
3. How happy people feel may depend _____ their plans.
4. There was a rise _____ the number of retired people who volunteer.
5. Some people worry _____ having too much free time after they stop working.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What could people keep from working life after they stop working?
2. Should a good retirement include learning something new?
3. How could a community make it easier to stay involved at any age?

9 Role-play: a friend who wants to retire early

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the colleague who wants to retire early

You'll be sixty next year and you'd like to stop working. Tell your friend your plans and why you want to go. Answer their questions and decide whether to change your mind.

Student B · the friend who is not sure

Your colleague wants to retire early. You're worried they'll miss work and have too little to do. Ask questions and suggest ideas, but listen to their reasons.

Useful phrases

I've been thinking about retiring early.
What would you do with all that free time?
I'm worried you'd get bored.
That's a fair point, but I'd rather stop now.
I'd like to learn a language and join a choir.
Why don't you work part-time first?

Afterwards, tell the class: did the friend change their mind, and what was the best idea?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 A · 2 D · 3 G · 4 F · 5 B · 6 C · 7 E · 8 H

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 T · 3 NG · 4 F · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 repetitive · 2 unexpected · 3 stressful · 4 meaningful · 5 curiosity

6 Verb forms

1 published · 2 made · 3 sounds · 4 was linked · 5 allowed

7 Language focus

1 to · 2 of · 3 on · 4 in · 5 about

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