NEWS LESSON

Could Leaving Work Change How We Think?



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	**reform**	☐	A	real, not false
2	**policy**	☐	B	keep something at the same level
3	**diagnoses**	☐	C	signs that show what something is like
4	**indicators**	☐	D	decisions about which illness a person has
5	**demanding**	☐	E	the reason for doing something
6	**genuine**	☐	F	a plan of action that a government or organisation agrees
7	**purpose**	☐	G	an official change to a law or system
8	**maintain**	☐	H	needing a lot of time, effort or skill

3 Read

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

A reform that raised the early retirement age let researchers compare women who left work at different ages. The results pointed in both directions.

1 On the last day of work, retirement can look like the beginning of a permanent holiday. No more early alarms, demanding meetings or emails arriving late in the evening. There might finally be time to travel, learn an instrument or spend long afternoons with friends. Yet a German study published in the Journal of Health Economics in July 2026 raised a more complicated question: what happens to our thinking abilities when the daily challenges of working life disappear?

2 The researchers examined a reform that raised the early retirement age for certain German women from sixty to sixty-three. That policy change created an opportunity to study the effects of spending different lengths of time in retirement. They focused on women aged sixty-three to sixty-seven and used tests involving memory, language and the ability to process information, alongside health insurance records. The approach was designed to separate the effects of retirement from some of the differences between people who simply choose to stop working.

3 The results did not tell one simple story. Additional time in retirement was linked to lower performance on measures of flexible thinking, which is used to deal with unfamiliar problems or new information. In contrast, accumulated knowledge was not affected in the same way. The researchers also found no increase in diagnoses of cognitive disorders. Some other health indicators, including depression, sleep problems and high blood pressure, actually improved with additional time in retirement.

4 That distinction matters. A headline claiming that retiring early damages the brain would go too far. The findings concern a particular group of women affected by a specific law, not everybody who leaves employment. They also do not show that retirement inevitably leads to dementia. Work can support mental activity, but it can also bring exhausting stress, and many people leave jobs because continuing would harm their health. There is no reason to assume that staying employed is automatically the healthiest choice.

5 One possible explanation is that working life gives people regular opportunities to solve problems, adapt to changes and keep up with complex information. When those demands disappear, certain mental skills may receive less practice. But retirement does not have to mean sitting around without anything to do. Volunteering, learning a new language, taking up a musical instrument or joining community groups can create fresh challenges and maintain social connections.

6 Perhaps the best response is to plan for retirement as a new stage of life rather than an endless weekend. Freedom from work can be a genuine gift, offering time to recover, spend with family and pursue neglected interests. The challenge is finding enough purpose and variety to keep life stimulating without recreating the pressures people wanted to escape. Leaving the office may be a sensible decision. Leaving curiosity behind would be a different matter entirely.

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. Accumulated knowledge declined in the same way as flexible thinking. (T) (F) (NG)
2. Similar research has been carried out on German men. (T) (F) (NG)
3. The researchers could compare women whose time in retirement differed because of the reform. (T) (F) (NG)
4. According to the text, staying in work is always the healthier choice. (T) (F) (NG)
5. Some health indicators got better with extra time in retirement. (T) (F) (NG)

5 Vocabulary

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

accumulated	adapt	alongside	assume	inevitably	neglected	permanent	unfamiliar

1. The council published its plan _____ a detailed map of the new bus routes.
2. Starting a job in a new industry, she found many of the tools _____ because she had never used them before.
3. He never touched the guitar again, and the instrument sat _____ in the attic for years.
4. Her _____ experience, built up over forty years in the job, made her the natural choice to lead the team.
5. If safety checks are ignored, accidents will _____ happen sooner or later.
6. Workers who _____ easily when tools change usually cope better with new systems.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By the time she turned sixty, she _____ to leave her job. (DECIDE)
2. The early retirement age for certain women _____ by the reform. (RAISE)
3. If he had known about the study, he _____ it. (READ)
4. Since she retired, she _____ up painting and joined a choir. (TAKE)
5. At nine o'clock last Friday, she _____ her farewell speech. (GIVE)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. A verb, adjective or noun often takes one fixed preposition. Check which one follows before you choose, because the same idea can need a different word in your own language.

about from in of on to with

1. Many people benefit _____ having a clear routine after leaving work.
2. Good planning contributes _____ a smoother change from work to retirement.
3. Some retirees rely _____ a small pension and part-time work.
4. Retired people are welcome to take part _____ the club's weekly events.
5. He is fond _____ his old colleagues and still sees them every week.

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

4 True, false or not given

1 F · 2 NG · 3 T · 4 F · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 alongside · 2 unfamiliar · 3 neglected · 4 accumulated · 5 inevitably · 6 adapt

6 Verb forms

1 had decided · 2 was raised · 3 would have read · 4 has taken · 5 was giving

7 Language focus

1 from · 2 to · 3 on · 4 in · 5 of

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