

Baycrest memory experts launch ‘thermometer’ for the mind

Free test aims to reassure the worried well and nudge those with serious memory issues to seek help

Toronto, Canada – If you are in the 50 to 79 age bracket, worried about your memory changes and whether you need to see a doctor, there is a free online brain health test developed by the memory experts at Baycrest Health Sciences that will help you with that decision.

The test, co-developed by the brain health solutions company **Cogniciti Inc.** (owned by Baycrest and partner MaRS Discovery District) – takes about 20 minutes to complete and is available to the public at www.cogniciti.com.

The game-like tests tap into functions such as memory and attention, which are affected by aging and brain disease. You can take the test on a desktop or laptop computer at home (with internet access), and receive an overall score of your cognitive health immediately after you finish.

According to the test’s creators, the majority of people will score in the normal, healthy range for their age – which will help reassure the “worried well”. For the small percentage (approximately 2 - 3%) that scores below average for their age and education, those adults will be encouraged to re-test after a week. If their score again falls below the normal threshold for their age, they will be provided with a personalized report that will help them *start the conversation* about their brain health with a doctor.

Designed by a team of clinical neuropsychologists and cognitive scientists at Baycrest Health Sciences and its world-renowned Rotman Research Institute – and lab tested with 300 adults aged 50 to 79 recruited from various sources including CARP Canada’s subscriber base – the brain health screen hammers a stake in the ground in an increasingly crowded field of online brain fitness products.

“Our aim with the brain health test is to reassure the worried well and nudge that small percentage of people who *do* have serious memory issues to discuss their concerns with a doctor,” said Dr. Angela Troyer, program director of Neuropsychology and Cognitive Health at Baycrest, and a lead member of the research team that developed the test.

“Given the growing consumer demand for quality brain health self-assessments, this new online test can help address the concerns of millions among the worried well,” said Alvaro Fernandez, CEO and co-founder of SharpBrains.com, an independent market research firm tracking health and performance applications of neuroscience. SharpBrains has 100,000 monthly readers for its popular brain blog and 45,000 eNewsletter subscribers.

After completing the test, users will receive a Yes/No report about whether to take their memory concerns to their doctor. If a score is below normal, the individual will be provided with a personalized report to take to the doctor.

The Cogniciti website is loaded with information that will help adults interested in proactively managing their brain health. Test scores are stored in a password protected form that helps test takers track their performance over time. A Memory Centre and a Caregiver Centre provide science-based information and tools related to prevention and management of brain health issues. An “Ask the Experts” tool allows site visitors to get specific information from Cogniciti’s panel of scientists, doctors and other professionals.

“Baycrest doctors and scientists tell us a natural part of aging is that our memories and attention spans start to decline,” said Michael Meagher, president of Cogniciti. “The key issue is determining when simple forgetfulness becomes something more serious.”

The early-stage symptoms for memory loss due to normal aging, or from highly treatable conditions such as anxiety and depression, or from serious diseases such as Alzheimer’s, are *so similar* that people tend to delay getting checked out – often for years. Those delays can cause needless worry for the well and make treatment tougher for those who do have a neurodegenerative disease.

“Our mission is to help eliminate the delays, get the right people in to see the doctor, and reduce unnecessary visits by the worried well.”

The test is free, private and based on rigorous research

According to the Alzheimer Society of Canada, close to half of Canadians with dementia wait too long for a diagnosis, after which treatments may not be as effective.

“Getting checked early is the best way to rule out other health problems that could be causing your cognitive issues,” said Dr. Troyer. “If it turns out that you do have a significant problem with your memory, then early diagnosis along with science-based education and interventions will help you maintain your cognitive health and independence for as long as possible, and enable you and your family to plan for the care and support you’ll need in future.”

‘It’s not a clinical diagnosis’

Dr. Troyer cautioned that the brain health test is *not* a clinical diagnosis. The test is a “thermometer for the mind” that can help a person determine whether or not to discuss their memory concerns with a doctor.

Cognitive problems are not always caused by an underlying dementia. Anxiety, sleep apnea, chronic

stress, depression, diabetes, and side effects from medications and chemotherapy, can all impact the ability to focus, pay attention and remember.

Cogniciti is providing the brain health test free to the public as part of an introductory launch. In future it may charge a small annual fee for people who wish to track their cognitive health more frequently and trend their performance over time. Proceeds will support Cogniciti's efforts to continue to advance the science of brain health.

The development of Cogniciti was supported in part by funding to Baycrest Health Sciences through the Ontario Brain Institute from the Technology Development Program of the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario.

Note: The test will not provide an overall performance score for those outside the age target of 50 to 79. For those testers, their performance data will contribute to building the database of normative testing scores for their age range – an important step for expanding the test's accuracy to additional age targets in future. Users outside the 50 to 79 age bracket will still benefit from learning about aging and memory changes, and strategies for maintaining brain health from the experts at Baycrest.

About Cogniciti Inc. (cogniciti.com)

Cogniciti Inc. was founded in 2010 by Baycrest and MaRS to help reshape the world of brain health. Cogniciti brings science-based brain health solutions to people, businesses and governments around the world. The solutions are badly needed to help millions of adults with significant memory concerns get earlier assessment, diagnosis and treatment; to help the tens of millions of adults with normal memory loss find peace-of-mind and effective coping tools; to help family caregivers better support loved ones with dementia; and to help keep cognitive healthcare affordable through science and technology innovations.

About Baycrest Health Sciences (baycrest.org)

Fully affiliated with the University of Toronto, Baycrest is a global leader in innovations in aging and brain health. Baycrest's Rotman Research Institute (RRI) is ranked among the best in the world for cognitive neuroscience focused on memory and aging. Through major international collaborations, scientists at Baycrest's RRI are driving research agendas around the world in the interest of learning more about the human brain and how it changes, adapts and recovers over time.

About MaRS

MaRS Discovery District (@MaRSDD) is a mission-driven innovation centre located in Toronto. MaRS works with partners to catalyze, accelerate and amplify innovation. MaRS supports entrepreneurs building Canada's next generation of growth companies. MaRS' ventures have created over 4,000 jobs and, in the last three years alone, they have raised over \$750 million in capital and earned over \$375 million in revenue.