

# Improving Caregiver Education about Dementia Through the Science of Learning



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## Background

- Informal caregivers provide approximately 83% of care for people living with dementia (PLwD) (Alzheimer's Association, 2024)
- Caregivers assist with complex medical tasks and manage challenging emotional and behavioral symptoms of dementia
- Care training can be limited (e.g., Ringer et al., 2020), and rarely involves evidence-based learning strategies that support knowledge retention
- Structured retrieval practice with detailed, corrective feedback (SRP) can enhance learning and retention, and reduce memory errors (for a review, see Agarwal et al., 2021)

## Our Goal

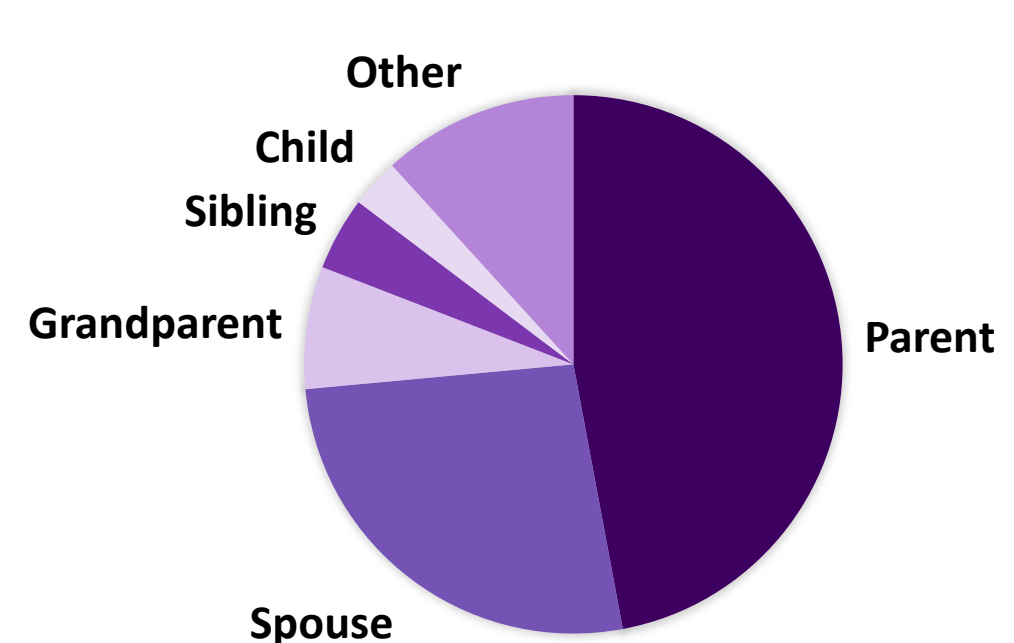
- Establish methods to improve caregiver education about the behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia (BPSD).
- Specifically, we predicted that the SRP intervention would protect against forgetting in the long-term when contrasted with a reading, active control comparison.

## Participants

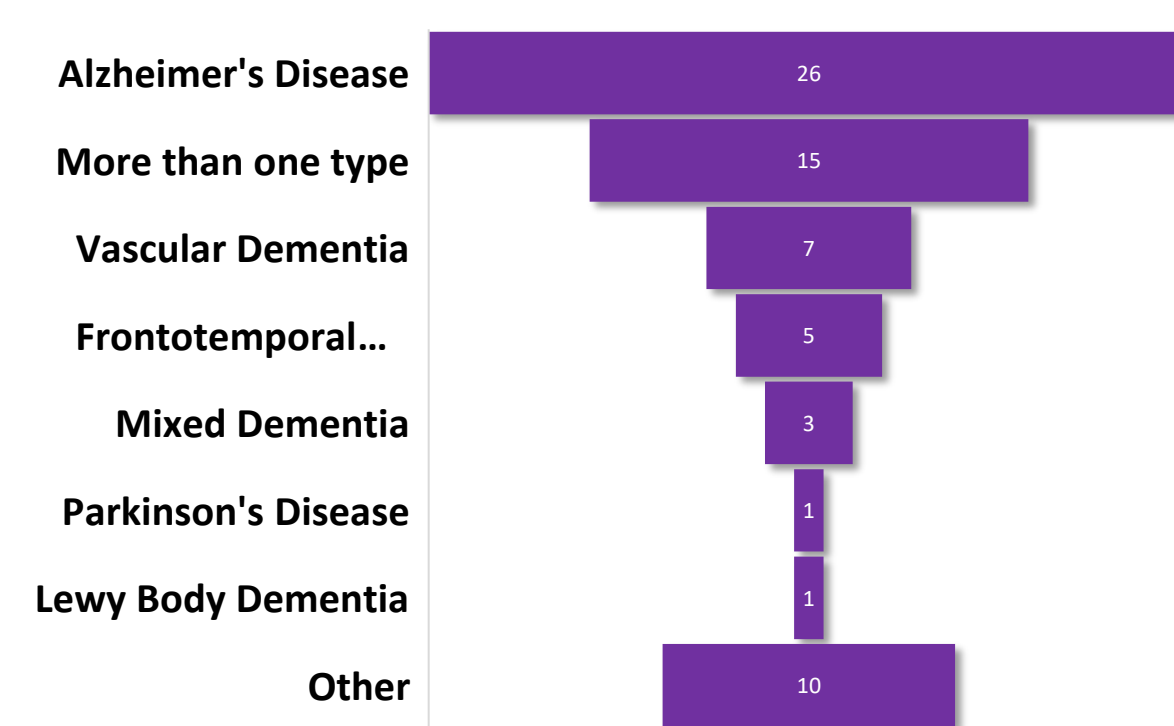
N = 68 Caregivers of PLwD recruited from the community

- SRP group, n = 29, Reread group, n = 39
- Age: 19-85 years old (M = 56.21, SD = 14.95)

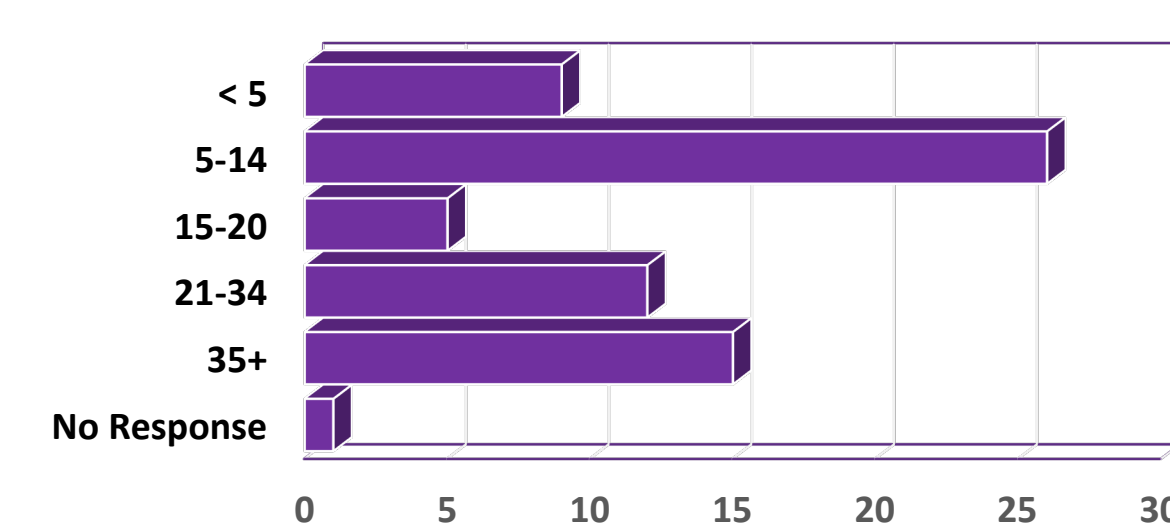
### RELATIONSHIP TO PLWD



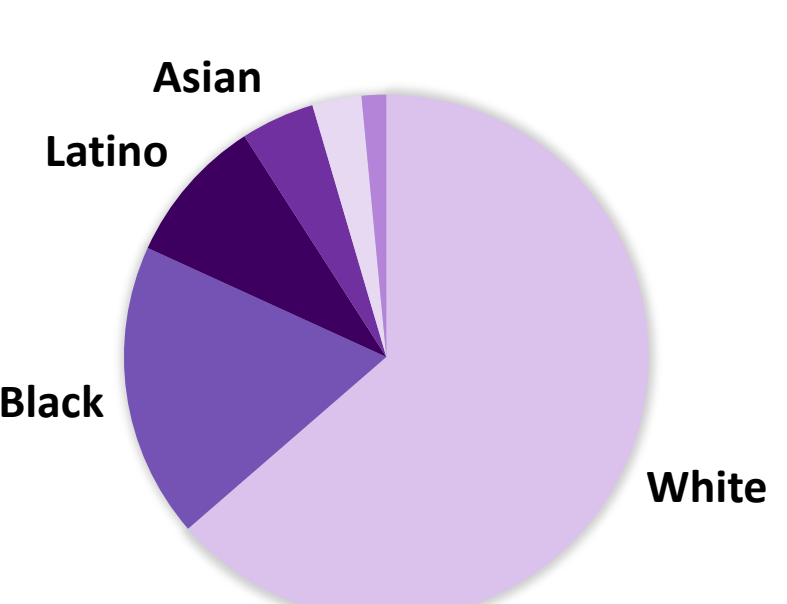
### PLWD TYPE OF DEMENTIA



### HOURS OF CAREGIVING PER WEEK



### PARTICIPANT RACE



## Materials

### Initial Learning & Rereading Materials

#### 4 Modules on emotion and mood symptoms of dementia:

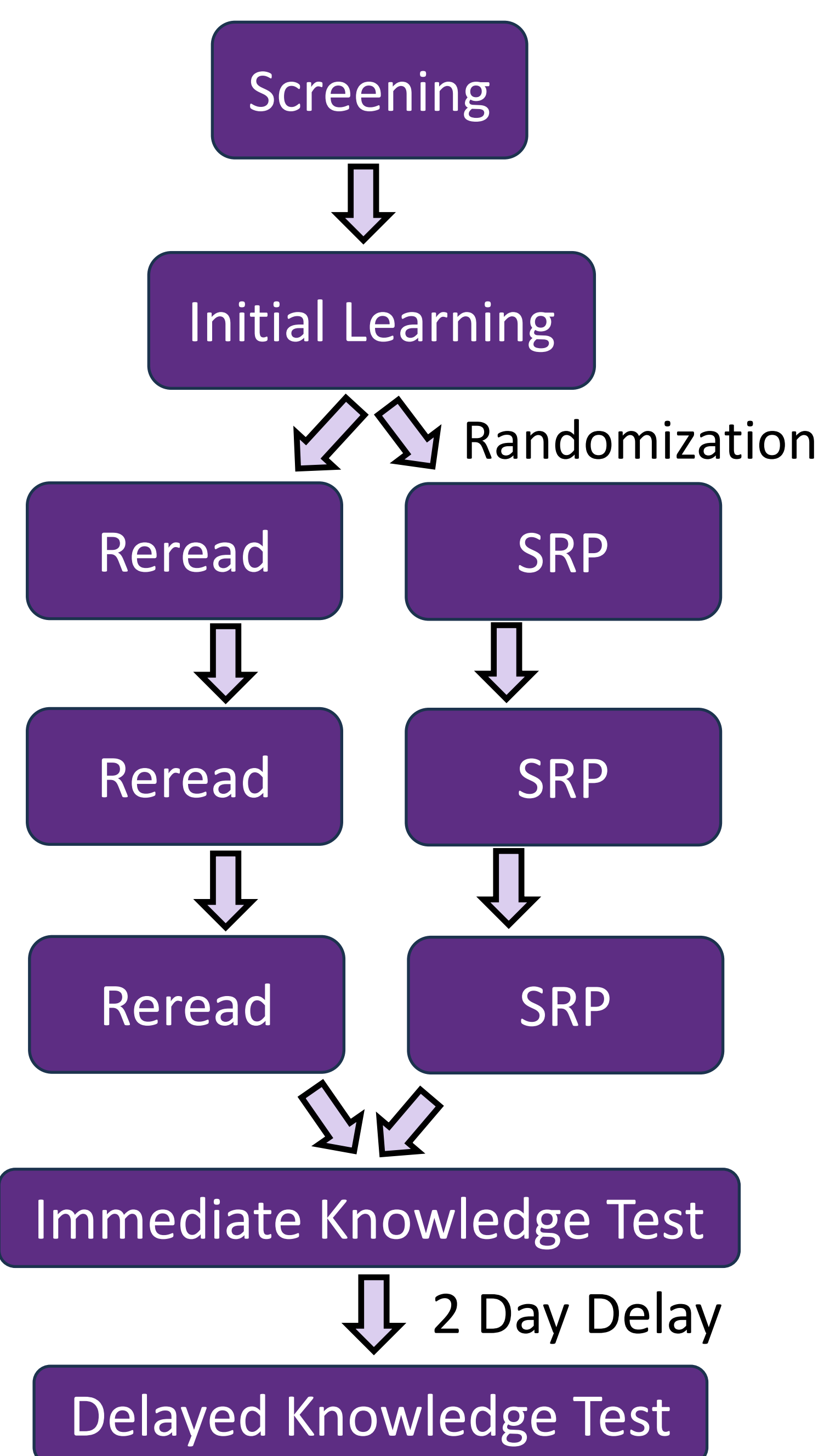
- Agitation
- Irritation
- Apathy
- depression

**Apathy and Dementia**

Sometimes, a person with dementia may lose interest in activities they used to enjoy. If this lasts for a long time and affects their daily life, it is called 'apathy'. Apathy means that a person loses the motivation or drive to do things. They might need a lot of encouragement to do even simple tasks, and without it, they may not do anything at all.

This can feel hard to watch because it may seem like the person you know has 'given up' or withdrawn. They may not smile, laugh, or show interest in others, making it difficult to help them.

## Design & Procedure



**Interview Questions:**

1. Can you please tell me your name?
2. What is your relationship to the person with dementia? Who is this person to you? (e.g., spouse, parent, grandparent, friend)
3. Describe a typical day in your caregiving routine.
4. Which of the following tasks do you regularly assist with? (bathing, dressing, administering medications, financial management, emotional support)
5. What type of dementia has your loved one been diagnosed with?
6. How long has your loved one been diagnosed?
7. What stage of dementia do you believe your loved one is in? (Mild, Moderate, Severe)
8. What is the most difficult part of caregiving for you?
9. How do you manage stress related to caregiving?
10. Where are you located? (city, town)
11. How did you hear about this study?

### Structured Retrieval Practice (SRP)

What's the best way to treat apathy in people living with dementia?

Encourage activities that are flexible  Focus on outdoor and social activities  Talking to a therapist  Taking medicine

Please select the correct answer

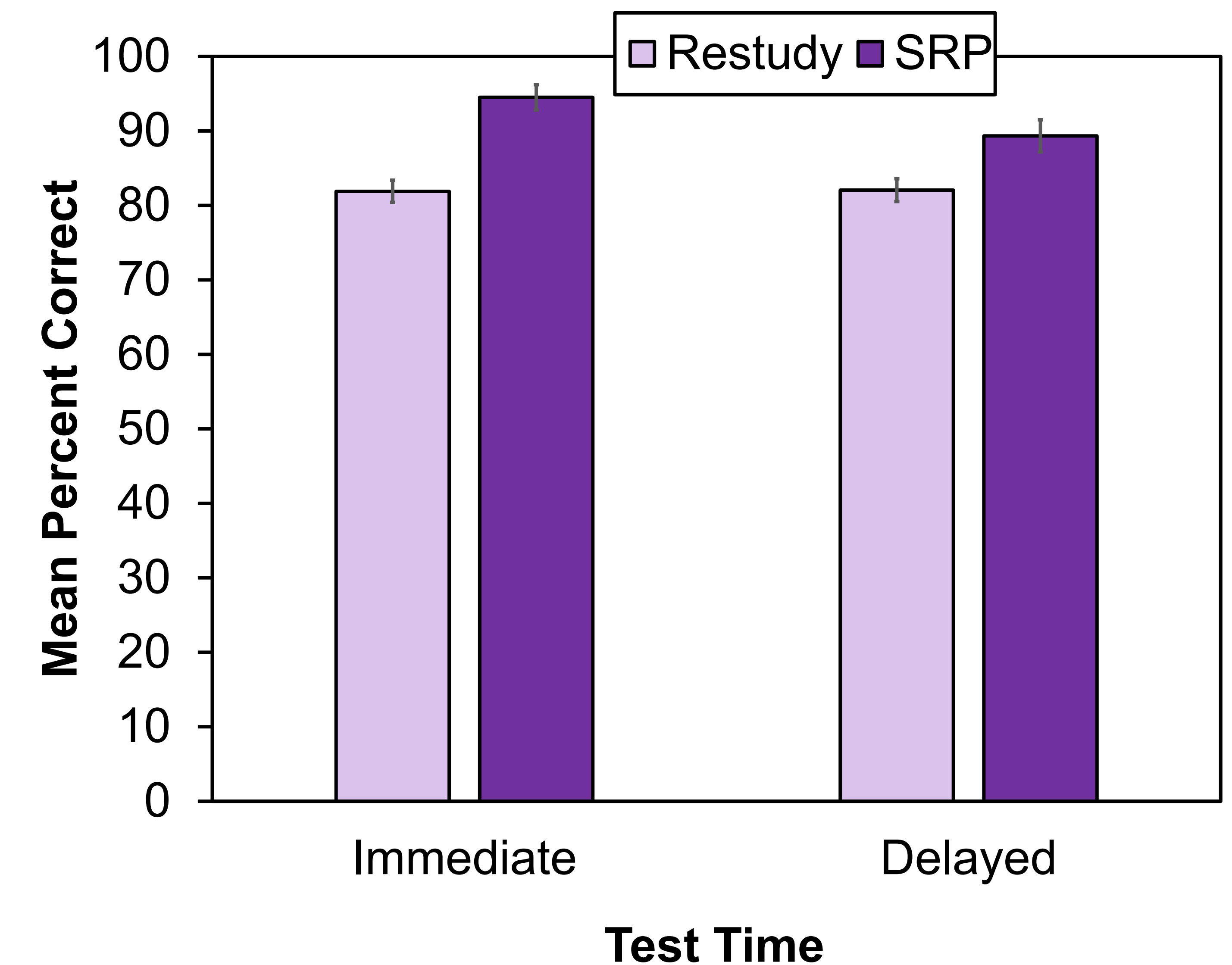
**No, that is incorrect.** Medicines usually don't work well for apathy. Instead, pick activities that you can adjust to match their changing skills and moods. Many people enjoy activities that are easy to do at home and don't need a lot of planning or equipment. Creating a daily schedule with activities like puzzles or art can help them find purpose and meaning in their day. Keeping their mind and body engaged is key.

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Please select the correct answer

## Results



## Conclusions

- Structured Retrieval Practice (SRP) significantly increased caregivers' memory for 4 BPSD relative to restudying the same materials
  - A clinically meaningful benefit (10% enhancement) on overall memory performance was observed
- Caregivers performed significantly better on the immediate test than on the delayed test
- There was also a significant interaction that was driven by enhanced memory for the SRP group on both the immediate and delayed test, but the enhancement was larger on the immediate test (13% gain) relative to the delayed test (7% gain)

## Future Directions

- Future work will examine the impact of the SRP intervention on caregivers' learning of other dementia care information
- We will also explore individual content (exploratory item-level analysis) to determine where the largest gains in knowledge are observed for caregivers to guide future work.