

Magnetic field 'can boost brain'

By Roger Highfield, Science Editor

(Filed: 07/06/2006)

Ordinary people could be capable of extraordinary feats of mental agility by turning off part of the brain with magnetic fields, according to Australian scientists.

In the Hollywood film Rain Man, the character played by Dustin Hoffman counts 246 toothpicks at lightning speed when a waitress spills them in a heap on the floor of a diner.

The ability of ordinary people to do this same feat can be boosted with magnetic fields, says Prof Allan Snyder, Director of the Centre for the Mind, a joint venture of the Australian National University and the University of Sydney.

His study, which is published this month in the journal Perception, investigates whether repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation, TMS, can improve a healthy person's ability to guess accurately the number of elements in a scene.

Participants in the study were presented with 50 to 150 random elements on a monitor.

Of the 12 participants, 10 improved their ability accurately to guess the number of elements immediately following TMS treatment to the left anterior temporal lobe, a skill that receded an hour later.

--