

Aerobic Exercise & Brain Health

The benefits of physical activity and habitual aerobic exercise on cognitive function and brain health are becoming increasingly appreciated both by the scientific community and the general public. However, guidelines for establishing public health recommendations remain unclear due to a lack of knowledge regarding the exact mechanisms through which exercise benefits brain function.

In a study, reported in the [July 2015 issue of MSSE](#), it was found that 30 minutes of stationary aerobic cycling improved the subjects ability to mentally store and update multiple features of information (i.e., working memory). Although their working memory accuracy improved by ~6.4 percent, there were no significant changes in their ability to exert control over irrelevant information (i.e., inhibitory control). Furthermore, no changes in either task occurred when the same participants completed a passive exercise control condition in which their legs were moved by motorized pedals on the same bike and at the same cadence as in the aerobic condition.

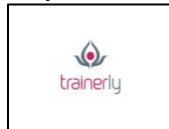
Based on these findings, it is suggested that actively engaging the musculoskeletal and cardiovascular systems at a moderate intensity, rather than moving passively, affects brain systems involved in working memory processes. This was observed in the acute phase after one exercise session. Future investigations that combine acute and chronic exercise paradigms within the same individuals may provide insight into how the specificity of acute effects contributes to long-term adaptations that accumulate with subsequent training.

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