

# **Aerobic Exercise Is Good For The Mature Brain**

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**By:** *Providence Medical Group*

You've heard that physical activity can help sharpen the brain, especially in people who are at risk for Alzheimer's disease.

Now, a study out of Wake Forest's School of Medicine adds to the scientific evidence that exercise can improve brain function.

Researchers found that aerobic exercise helped retain and even increase the brain's volume in older adults. That's significant because loss of brain volume can be a sign of dementia or Alzheimer's.

"Even over a short period of time, we saw aerobic exercise lead to a remarkable change in the brain," said the study's lead investigator, Laura D. Baker, a professor at Wake Forest.

## **What the research showed**

Researchers set out to characterize the brains of people with mild cognitive impairment, which could include problems with memory and decision-making, and then compare their brains after participants did different types of exercise.

People who are diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment are at increased risk of developing dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

The researchers took magnetic-resonance images of the brains of 35 adults with an average age of 63 at the beginning of the study and then again after six months of an exercise routine. They found increases in the brain's gray matter in both people who did aerobic exercises and in those who simply stretched. The regions of increased volume included the temporal lobe, which supports short-term memory.

"Compared to the stretching group, the aerobic activity group had greater preservation of total brain volume, increased local gray matter volume and increased directional stretch of brain tissue," said co-investigator Jeongchul Kim.

## **Aerobic exercise and you**

Aerobic activity is defined as rhythmic muscle movement for a sustained interval. Sometimes it's called endurance or cardio activity. In the study, people who did aerobic exercises used treadmills, stationary bikes or elliptical machines four times a week for six months. Aerobic exercise also may include:

- Walking
- Running
- Swimming
- Cycling
- Rowing

- Cardio classes
- Dancing
- Boxing
- Some team sports, such as soccer and basketball

Talk to your health care provider about what kind of exercise program would be best for you.

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