

[IMAGE]

Exercise: Your Brain Will Thank You!

By Editorial Staff

Substantial research supports the health benefits of exercise when it comes to the body: improved strength, flexibility and endurance, to name a few. How about a reduced risk of developing cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and a lengthy list of other diseases? And don't forget the mental health benefits, including reduced stress, better self-confidence and greater overall happiness. (Endorphins released during exercise promote feelings of happiness and well-being.)

But with all that, don't overlook how exercise can influence the function of our most important organ: the brain. A growing body of research also supports the value of exercise when it comes to brain health, specifically the risk of developing cognitive decline with age. How important is exercise in this regard? According to a new study in *Neurology*, seniors – even those with cognitive impairments – who exercise score higher on thinking tests compared to seniors who don't exercise. In fact, the test improvements from baseline (at the start of the study) to post-exercise (after a six-month exercise program) are equivalent to reversing nearly nine years of aging, according to the researchers.

While six months of exercise did not appear to improve memory, it did improve what's known as "executive function" – the ability to pay attention, organize ideas, achieve goals and regulate overall behavior. What's more, the exercise requirements that led to these improvements weren't excessive: 45 minutes, three times a week (10-minute warm-up; 35 minutes of walking, jogging, cycling, etc.). Exercise participants worked out at 70 percent of their max heart rate for the first three months, and 85 percent during months 4-6.

Sound achievable? Of course it does! And when you think about the profound health benefits, it's well ... a no-brainer. Your doctor can help outline the appropriate exercise program suitable for your age, overall health, weight-loss goals and other considerations.

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