

[IMAGE]

Your Brain Loves Cardio

By Editorial Staff

Especially as you get older. That's the conclusion of several recent studies that suggest seniors who participate in cardiovascular exercise have healthier, better functioning brains – exactly what we all want as we get older and start to worry about cognitive decline.

In one study, older adults with a family history of or genetic predisposition toward Alzheimer's disease improved various parameters of brain health including brain glucose metabolism (a reflection of neuronal health) and higher-order thinking skills with six months of aerobic exercise. The cardio program consisted of three weekly moderate-intensity, personal-trainer-directed treadmill sessions for 26 weeks. (Older adults who were not included in the cardio program did not achieve these brain benefits after 26 weeks.)

Writing about their findings in *Brain Plasticity*, the study authors also note that 99 percent of participants stuck with the program and also improved their cardiorespiratory fitness - meaning their brains and bodies got healthier! Now that's a win-win for seniors.

In a second study, researchers found that cardiorespiratory fitness in adults of all ages, including seniors, is associated with "[gray matter] volume, total brain volume, and specific GM and white matter clusters in brain areas not primarily involved in movement processing." Published in *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, the study suggests cardio fitness not only improves brain health, but in so doing, also might decrease (or at least decelerate) reductions in brain gray matter linked to brain pathology.

So, why is gray matter important? Simple. Reductions in gray matter have been associated in previous research with an increased risk of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease. If cardio fitness helps maintain gray matter, it's accomplishing precisely what the first study suggests: improving physical *and* mental health!

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