

[IMAGE]

Smell Improves Memory?

By Editorial Staff

Memory and *smell* – how could they possibly be related? Researchers have the answer, and it may have important applications for managing cognitive decline with age (particularly cognitive issues characterized by memory deficits). No one wants to lose their memory; not short term and certainly not the cherished, long-term memories that sustain us. Let's see the latest research adds to a conversation that can give us all hope.

Neuroscientists at the University of California, Irvine (UCI) Center for the Neurobiology of Learning & Memory found that significant memory improvements were achieved in older adults (ages 60-85 and without memory impairment) who were exposed to a fragrance (one of seven different natural oils each night) that wafted through their bedrooms for two hours a night while they slept. Compared to the control group (older adults, also without memory impairment, who were exposed to only insignificant amounts of fragrance), cognitive capacity increased a whopping 226% after six months.

The researchers verified the memory improvements in two ways: a common word list test used to evaluate memory; and brain imaging, which revealed better integrity in a brain pathway called the left uncinate fasciculus. Findings, which appear in a recent issue of the peer-reviewed research journal *Frontiers in Neuroscience*, add to the evidence suggesting the olfactory (smell) and limbic (memory) systems are connected.

With baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964; now ages 59-77) representing 15 percent of the population, that means approximately 68 million U.S. adults are at risk for experiencing cognitive decline as we speak. Imagine if something as simple (and easy to do) as exposing oneself to essential oil scents while sleeping (in the study, participants were given seven essential oils and inserted one into a diffuser every night before bed) could help preserve memory and in so doing, stave off an agonizingly frustrating symptom of cognitive decline?

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