

# Exercise Your Way to a Sharper Mind

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Last Reviewed 11/01/2012



The best way to stave off memory loss isn't just with crossword puzzles and games of chess. While [intellectual stimulation is important](#), a new study reveals that **physical exercise may be even more critical for maintaining a sharp mind.**

Researchers at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland gave questionnaires to 691 volunteers when they were all 70 years of age. They asked for the participants' level of physical and intellectual activity, as well as the frequency of their leisure activities. Then, three years later they gave the participants an MRI brain scan to measure structural changes which indicate cognitive decline.

Their findings showed that those who reported the **highest level of physical activity** at 70 years of age had the fewest indicators of brain decline in their MRI scan. Meanwhile, mental stimulation and leisure activities had no impact on brain changes.

**These findings underscore what I've long said—that physical activity is critical to brain health.** It improves blood flow to your brain, including critical nutrients and oxygen. Exercise also boosts the production of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), which promotes the growth of new neurons and plays a key role in neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to fend off and recover from damage and degeneration.

In addition to exercising, a healthy Mediterranean-type diet will also help to keep you sharp in your later years. Specific foods that protect against memory loss include fish, mono-and polyunsaturated fats, low-fat dairy products, blueberries, cocoa, green tea, coffee, and alcohol (light-to-moderate—heavy drinking fries your brain).

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Date : 20. 02. 2013