

Can Exercise Improve Memory in the Elderly?

We learn something new every day. Or we would if only we could remember everything that we once knew. Life is the sum of one's experiences. As a person becomes more forgetful with age, these experiences become harder to recall.

There is good news if you find you are getting more forgetful than you used to be or ought to be. Studies have proved that exercise may protect against or at least delay cognitive decline in adulthood.

What does this mean? The hippocampus is the part of the brain that stores memories. Unfortunately for us, it shrinks during late adulthood, leading to impaired memory and an increased risk of dementia. Fortunately for us, it's one part of our brains where we can build or develop volume.

Studies have shown that aerobic exercises effectively reverse hippocampal volume loss in late adulthood, followed by an improvement in memory function. So can exercises improve memory in the elderly? Studies have shown that, to some extent, this is possible.

What can you do about it? The exercises recommended for the development of the hippocampus are primarily aerobic exercises, popularly known as cardio. These are exercises that cause a temporary increase in heart rate, increasing the blood flow to the brain. It is what your hippocampus needs to begin the journey to regeneration.

Try Some Of These Exercises To Improve Memory In Yourself Or An Older Adult You Know:


1. **Running.** Running is a moderately intense activity. If you can run for 30 minutes, five days a week, you will start to notice yourself getting mentally sharper.
2. **Jogging.** Jogging is milder on your joints than running. Jogging for between 30 to 45 minutes a day increases the blood flow in the hippocampus, boosting its functionality.
3. **Brisk walking.** Join a walking group and have fun as you walk for a mile or two. It doesn't matter if walking is all you can do—walking faster than you usually do, as often as you can, boosts your memory recall.

♦ **A brisk walk for 20mins or 30 mins a day is helpful to slow down the rate at which the memory declines in an older adult.**

4. **Cycling.** If you enjoy cycling, there are cycling groups you can join. Search for cycling competitions to register for to give you more motivation to engage in this exercise.
5. **Dancing.** Another fun way to increase your heart rate is through dance. Dance your way into improving the blood flow in your hippocampus. Dancing can help your brain form, store, and process information.
6. **Juggling.** If you are too weak or bedridden for active cardio, you can try specific routines, like hand movements. A popular example of that is juggling. It is great for increasing hand-eye coordination. You could also learn to do gymnastics with your fingers.

When are these exercises most effective? Note that the **studies show it is important for the exercise to happen around the time the memory is formed.** Thus, regular exercise is necessary since we create new memories every day.

The best time to do this is usually early in the morning before one uses or needs the brain to learn and keep information.



Are there alternatives? While not scientifically proven, some have reported seeing benefits from specific mental exercises like working on puzzles or jigsaws, learning a different language, or trying to solve tricky math equations.

The best solution in the end? **Any exercise is better than no exercise at all.** Even if not just for memory gains and for a person's overall health. In the end, prevention is better. Exercising now will benefit you more in the long run. Choose preservation over seeking improvement after your condition has gotten worse.