Increasing Physical Activity Shown to Reduce Risk of Alzheimer’s Disease

A new study in the Journal of Alzheimer’s Disease showed that a variety of physical activities—from walking to gardening and dancing—can improve brain volume and cut the risk of Alzheimer’s disease by 50%. The study is the first to show that any type of aerobic physical activity can improve brain structure and reduce Alzheimer’s disease risk.

Researchers studied a long-term cohort of patients in the 30-year Cardiovascular Health Study (N = 876; average age = 78 years) across four research sites in the United States. Participants had longitudinal memory follow up, which included standard questionnaires about their physical activity habits. Participants also had magnetic resonance imaging scans of the brain analyzed by advanced computer algorithms to measure the volumes of brain structures, including those implicated in memory and Alzheimer’s disease. The physical activities performed were correlated to the brain volumes and spanned a wide variety of interests (e.g., gardening, dancing, riding an exercise cycle at the gym). Weekly caloric output from these activities was summarized.

Results showed that increasing physical activity was correlated with larger brain volumes in the frontal, temporal, and parietal

Homeless Individuals Experience More Geriatric Conditions Sooner Than Older Adults

Homeless individuals in their fifties have more geriatric conditions than those living in homes who are decades older, according to researchers at the University of California–San Francisco, who followed 350 homeless individuals 50 and older in Oakland, California.

Although the homeless individuals’ median age was 58 years, they had more trouble bathing, dressing, and eating than 80-year-old individuals who had housing. They had a harder time using transportation, taking their medications, managing money, applying for benefits, arranging a job interview, and finding a lawyer, as well as higher rates of cognitive and visual impairment and urinary incontinence. They were also more likely to fall and be depressed.

Approximately 40% of homeless adults reported difficulty with one or more activities of daily living, and one third reported having fallen in the past 6 months. Approximately one quarter had cognitive impairment, 45% had vision impairment, and 48% had urinary incontinence.

lobes, including the hippocampus. Individuals experiencing this brain benefit from increasing their physical activity experienced a 50% reduction in their risk of Alzheimer’s dementia. Increasing physical activity also benefitted the brain volumes of the approximately 25% of individuals who had mild cognitive impairment associated with Alzheimer’s disease.


Nursing Home Compare Website Leaves Users With Unanswered Questions

A study of 63 individuals who placed a relative or friend in a nursing home in the past 6 months found that few were aware of the Nursing Home Compare website, published online by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to help families find the best and closest available care facility.

The study, published in *Health Affairs*, showed that individuals who viewed the website often did not trust it, at least initially. Many were interested in questions that the website did not answer, such as how to find a nursing home that was affordable, offered multiple activities for residents, and had beds available for individuals who rely on Medicaid. Most individuals interviewed understood the importance of staffing, but showed little interest in the website’s core clinical quality measures, such as pain management, use of restraints, and prevention of pressure sores, infections, and falls.

The authors urge CMS to highlight their role in collecting the data for Nursing Home Compare and to make it clear that federal regulators, and not the nursing homes, maintain the website and collect data. The authors also suggest CMS could improve the website’s appeal by adding more information about costs, inserting opinions from nursing home residents about the quality of their experience, and quantifying the availability of activities for residents.


New iPad®-Based Application to Help Improve Choice of Nursing Home

A new iPad®-based application (app) created at the University of California–Irvine can improve patients’ choice of a nursing home. When rating quality measures for nursing homes, patients and experts at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) usually disagree on what is best, leading researchers to conclude patients may benefit from a more person-ized approach to choosing a nursing home.

The app, Nursing Home Compare Plus, enabled patients to rank the importance of each performance measure according to their personal medical needs and preferences. The app combined the performance measures published on the CMS Nursing Home Compare website with the preferences expressed by patients and their family. A list of nursing homes that combined personal preferences and the Nursing Home Compare performance measures was provided to patients.

Researchers quantified the level of agreement between Nursing Home Compare Plus and the five-star rankings by measuring the level of agreement between the two for all nursing homes in each user’s zip code–based choice set, on a scale of 0 to 1, with 0 indicating random agreement and 1 indicating perfect agreement. Levels of agreement ranged from 0.22 to 0.38, indicating

New Multi-Site Study to Help Older Adults Avoid Mobility Problems

Wake Forest Baptist and five other institutions (including the University of Florida, Tufts University, Northwestern University, University of Pittsburgh, and University of Vermont) are launching a multi-site study to determine if reducing chronic, low-grade inflammation common in older adults can help avert mobility problems. They will enlist 300 older adults who have or are at risk for mobility limitations and see whether omega-3 fish oil and the blood pressure drug losartan (both of which have proven effective in lessening inflammation) can improve physical function and help prevent mobility loss.

substantial disagreement between the two ranking systems, indicating that the “one size fits all patients” approach to choosing a nursing home might not be best.


New Study Shows Alzheimer’s Disease Impairs Facial Recognition Abilities

A study in the *Journal of Alzheimer’s Disease* has demonstrated that, beyond causing memory problems, Alzheimer’s disease also impairs visual face perception.

Researchers recruited older adults with and without Alzheimer’s disease to study their ability to perceive faces and cars in photographs that were upright or upside down. Impairment was observed in the early stages of the disease.

The fact that impaired facial recognition might stem from a holistic perception problem—and not just a general memory problem—opens the door to different strategies (e.g., recognition of particular facial traits or voice recognition) to help patients recognize their loved ones for longer.


Older Adults May Benefit from Bonds Formed With Dogs

A study in *The Gerontologist* has determined that older adults who are dog owners benefit from the bonds they form with their canine companions. Dog walking is associated with lower body mass index, fewer physician visits, more frequent exercise, and an increase in social benefits for older adults.

The study analyzed 2012 data from the Health and Retirement study sponsored by the National Institute on Aging and the Social Security Administration, and included data about human–animal interactions, physical activity, frequency of physician visits, and health outcomes of participants.

Results indicated individuals with higher degrees of pet bonding were more likely to walk their dogs and spend more time walking their dogs than those who reported weaker bonds. In addition, results showed that pet walking offered a means to socialize with pet owners and others.


Strength Training May Help Older Adults Lower Odds of Death

Older adults who met twice-weekly strength training guidelines had lower odds of dying, according to a new analysis in *Preventive Medicine*. The study is the first to demonstrate the association in a large, nationally representative sample over an extended time period in an older population.

Researchers examined data from the 1997-2001 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) linked to death certificate data through 2011. During the survey period, which included 30,000 adults age 65 and older, >9% of older adults reported strength training at least two times per week. Researchers followed respondents for 15 years through death certificate data from the National Center for Health Statistics National Death Index. Approximately one third of respondents had died by 2011.

Older adults who strength trained at least two times per week had 46% lower odds of death than those who did not. They also had 41% lower odds of cardiac death and 19% lower odds of dying from cancer.